

Velva Linda's Double Life



Dulci Daily



An "Adult Tv" Novel



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Reluctant Press
P.O. Box 5829
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Velva Linda's Double Life

by Dulci Daily

Chapter 1

Pete Stigmire's smile was more than usually mischievous tonight, as he gazed over his glass of cream sherry at Velva Linda Buenazno, sitting next to him on the love seat in her apartment. She was still fully clothed, in her stunning, semi-sheer, bright red blouse that distinctly displayed her skimpy, lacy white bra beneath, her short dark brown skirt that passed for professional attire while showing off more than a little of her plump, pretty thighs, and her matching dark brown low-heeled pumps. None of these articles of clothing, she felt sure, would long remain where they were.

Velva Linda gazed back at Pete, at his too-familiar blond hair, his sparkling blue eyes, his strong-looking, jutting chin, and his mighty manly body that had united so often with her own. She knew they were go-

ing to make love again—at least, *she* desperately insisted on calling it “making love,” though Pete did not—but Pete seemed to have something else on his mind as well. Too soon Velva Linda found out what it was.

“Babe,” Pete said, “I think it’s time for a break.” Pete almost always called Velva Linda “Babe.” She was, she knew, an outstandingly cute, discreetly hot-looking “babe” in the view of many men, but only Pete was allowed to address her as “Babe.” Only Pete knew her weakness; only he, at least for the last few years, had seen and felt her secret. Only Pete was the man she was desperate to marry, if ever she could—and only Pete knew it, all too well.

“What do you mean—a break?” Velva Linda asked. She took a sip from her own glass of wine and swallowed it quickly, trying to ensure she wouldn’t choke when she found out what Pete meant. Did he want to break up with her, to dump her, after all she had done for him, and all he knew she could still do for him? Impossible—and yet what else could he mean?

“I need a new challenge,” Pete informed her. “This is getting a little old, a little stale. You know what I mean?”

“No, I *don’t* know what you mean,” Velva Linda retorted hotly at once. “We’ve been having a—a very good relationship. I don’t see any reason why we couldn’t stay together for a long time.”

“We’ll get back together, all right,” Pete assured her. “But first I need you to help me climb Mount Everest.”

Velva Linda stared, then laughed. “No way,” she said. “I won’t even help you climb Mount Quoheemish, and that’s less than half as high as Mount Everest, plus it’s a whole lot closer to here. I’m not a mountain climber, or a skier either. You know that.”

“It’s a figure of speech,” Pete said. “I’m not talking about literally climbing a mountain. I’m talking about seducing a Catholic virgin.”

I should have known it would be something like that, Velva Linda thought. Pete had been almost obsessed with the notion of seducing Catholic virgins when he and Velva Linda were attending St. Ives Law School in Appledale together. He hadn’t actually minded too much that Velva Linda herself wasn’t a virgin, and had a four-inch secret under her skirt that ordinary young ladies didn’t have—but still, if he ever thought he saw any chance of seducing a Catholic virgin, that had to take first priority. Once he even complained to Velva Linda that too many females around St. Ives were easy pickings—he had anticipated more of a challenge in seducing women at a Catholic institution, and he was sorely disappointed!

Velva Linda bit her lip to try to keep back her tears. It didn’t work. She wished Pete would be faithful to her, but she knew he wouldn’t. Even if they were ever married, she was pretty sure Pete would cheat on her, although she wouldn’t cheat on *him*. Sometimes she felt like cursing her weakness for Pete. She couldn’t really curse it, though, and she couldn’t leave him to await some man as yet unknown.

“What about *me?*” she said with a pouty, saucy smile, even while failing to keep back the tears. “I’m a Catholic. Aren’t I good enough for you?”

Pete laughed. “You’re a *bad* Catholic,” he said. “A *really* bad Catholic. I’m talking about a *good* Catholic. The girl I’m thinking of goes to Mass every day, and she’s unquestionably a virgin—but I can tell she’s repressing some pretty strong feelings, and I’ve just got to help her break free.”

You mean you’ve just got to screw her and dump her in the trash! Velva Linda could feel her face flushing with hot anger at the thought—not least because of her almost constant fear that Pete would dump *her* in the trash. She wondered how Pete wanted her to

help. She wondered, too, whether she might be able to derail Pete's scheme, discreetly and secretly, if she pretended to be helping him carry it out.

"How do you want me to help you?" she asked.

"Get to know this girl," Pete said. "Pretend you're a repentant sinner, who needs a good Catholic friend like her. Get her to trust you—and get her to trust *me*, your non-Catholic friend who's now seriously considering whether to become a Catholic."

Pete grinned. Velva Linda did not. She frowned and turned away. "What's in it for *me*?" she asked.

"Well, *this*, for one thing," Pete said. Velva Linda heard him softly putting his wine glass down on the coffee table. Then she felt his arms reaching around her from behind, and his hands caressing her breasts through her blouse and her bra. She clutched his hands, thinking of trying to pull them away, but she just couldn't. Her weakness for him was too strong. She only succeeded in pressing his hands firmly against her breasts.

"Babe, you're my one and only," Pete assured her, kissing her on the neck and stroking her small but delectable breasts. "Don't begrudge me a quick fling or two. It only helps me return to you refreshed."

Velva Linda sighed. "Well, if you're sure," she murmured. "Show me I'm your one and only."

"Gladly." Pete unbuttoned her blouse, undid her front-hook bra, and caressed her bare, delicately hormone-enhanced breasts. Her dark, pointy nipples were hard, and so was her four-inch secret beneath her skirt. Her breathing was already heavy with desire.

"Oh, Pete, I love you," Velva Linda moaned, pulling one of his hands down to touch her secret through her skirt. She turned her head far around to kiss Pete on the mouth. He reached beneath her skirt to stroke her secret through her panties. Her broad, girlish



hips were moving in rhythm with his hand as he stroked her secret.

“Make love with me, Pete. Please. Now,” Velva Linda begged. Pete eagerly complied. They stood facing each other and embracing. She could feel Pete’s long, hard penis through his trousers. Pete stripped off her blouse and bra; then he pulled down her skirt and panties at once, revealing her short, stout, throbbing secret with its swollen purple plum, and her balls bulging beneath it. She pressed her secret and her balls down into hiding between her legs, making her look fully like a woman from the front.

Rapidly. Pete stripped and embraced her in the nude, claspng her womanly buttocks hard, then reaching back beneath them to caress Velva Linda’s balls and her backward-facing plum. “Oh, Babe, yes, yes, *yes*,” Pete murmured. “Yes, you’re my one and only!” Keeping his hand on her plum, he moved around behind her and began to rub his penis against her secret behind her buttocks. Slowly they moved toward the wall.

Velva Linda knew well what would happen now. Pete’s penis, still rubbing against her secret, pressed onward into the tight, hot gap between her secret and her thigh. When it was fully inserted, with its bulb sticking out in front beneath Velva Linda’s delta, she leaned forward against the wall. Pete grasped her breasts again, and she reached down with one hand to stroke his bulb.

“Oh, my God,” Pete moaned, though he didn’t believe in God. “Babe, you’re the greatest! You’re my one and only!” He was thrusting hard and clutching Velva Linda’s breasts with manly might.

Velva Linda rubbed and squeezed his bulb vigorously with her hand, while her hips and her hidden secret trembled with wanton delight as she felt the onrush of orgasm. Soon she felt Pete’s slippery semen all over her hand, while her own semen spurted all over Pete’s balls and his thighs behind her own.

“Oh, Babe, you’re the finest,” Pete moaned, clasping Velva Linda tightly from behind. “A fling is a fling, but you’re the one for me forever!” Desperately Velva Linda hoped it was true, or wished it were true—and yet, even now, she knew she could never be sure.

Only a few days later, Velva Linda walked into St. Genesius Cathedral in downtown Pacific Heights for midday Mass. She was actually going to go through with it—though not in exactly the way Pete would wish. She had seen the picture of the girl she was to meet, Marguerite Rougemont, on the Totally Catholic Singles website. She knew that Marguerite was a paralegal at Farquhar, Hardart & Frick, the same prestigious law firm where Pete was an attorney, and the top local competitor of Grando, Nix & Fumus, where Velva Linda herself had now been an attorney for about three years. She had rehearsed what she would say when she met Marguerite, perhaps pretty much in accordance with Pete’s wishes.

At least one thing, though, was not at all in accordance with Pete’s wishes. Velva Linda was going to tell Marguerite she had just returned to the sacraments—and it would be true. She had gone to confession, and had confessed (among other things) that she had had sex with a man approximately 150 times since her last confession about 15 months ago. She remembered the drill well from when she had given up sex for Lent in some past years, most recently last year, though not this year. Now it was not Lent, it was a bright day in June, and Velva Linda had no ashes on her forehead as she had on Ash Wednesday last year—but she was giving up sex all the same, at least for now. She was pretty sure it wouldn’t last forever, but at least she was going to give it a try—again.

She looked through the gathering crowd in the pews of the cathedral for Marguerite. Pete had said she was tall and slender, and would probably be wearing her long dark hair in a ponytail. Velva Linda

spotted a young lady fitting that description, simply but neatly dressed in a high-necked blouse and a knee-length skirt, kneeling and seeming absorbed in prayer; her face looked as if it could be the same face Velva Linda had seen on the website. After looking around to make sure no one else looked more like Marguerite, she entered the pew and knelt beside the young lady.

Soon the Mass began. Velva Linda remembered the responses from when she had attended Mass before, most recently at Easter last year, not long before she started having sex with Pete again. Again and again she glanced at Marguerite—supposing the young lady really was Marguerite—whose attention seemed fixed on the priest and the crucifix behind him.

The readings, the homily, the prayers of the faithful, the offertory, the consecration, the Our Father rolled steadily onward; then the time came for the sign of peace. Velva Linda turned toward the young lady, smiled, and offered her hand. She was rewarded with a firm handshake and a lovely, bright-eyed, wide-mouthed, kind-looking smile that nearly took her breath away. If this was really Marguerite, and if Pete had ever seen her smile like that, Velva Linda could readily see how Pete might regard her as the Mount Everest of his life—the highest point, the supreme challenge, the awe-inspiring summit of his endeavors. What Velva Linda could not understand—or *wished* she could not understand, although she knew she could, because she knew what kind of man Pete was—was how Pete could imagine it would be better to seduce her than to marry her.

The time came for Communion. Velva Linda remembered, with a shock of delight, that it was actually all right for her to go to Communion for a change. After all, she had confessed her sins and resolved not to commit them any more—even though she wasn't sure how long her resolution would last. She arose and received the Bread of Life, together with the

young lady who—she devoutly hoped—was soon to be her friend.

After Mass, the young lady stayed and prayed. Velva Linda, who was not accustomed to pray except on rare, unusually stressful occasions, sat and looked at the big statue of St. Genesius near the corner of the sanctuary. Like most Catholics (good, bad, or mediocre) in the Archdiocese of Pacific Heights, Velva Linda knew the story of St. Genesius: he was a comedian performing before the Roman emperor, putting on a ridiculous imitation of a Christian, until he suddenly decided to become a Christian for real—after which the emperor, after some delay, managed to stop laughing and ordered him to be put to death. The statue showed St. Genesius ripping off a grotesque-looking comic mask to reveal a kindly-looking, smiling, bearded face beneath. Velva Linda couldn't help thinking there was some deep mystery behind the story and the statue, if only she could fathom it.

The young lady got up to go. Velva Linda quickly followed. "Excuse me," she said after they had both genuflected and begun to walk toward the doors. "I wonder if you can help me. I don't really know anyone here, and I—I've just returned to the sacraments."

The young lady's face, shy and surprised at first, was soon transfigured with joy. "Oh, thanks be to God!" she cried. Looking around quickly at the few people still kneeling and praying, she said more softly, "Let's go outside, and we can talk!"

As soon as they had emerged through the wide, high doors of the cathedral, the young lady turned toward Velva Linda and said, "I'm so glad to have met you! I'm Marguerite Rougemont. What's your name?"

"Velva Linda Buenazno," said Velva Linda. It really was her legal name, and had been for about 10 years now, ever since she graduated from high school and abandoned her former identity as a boy named Vicente.

“Oh, that’s a lovely name!” said Marguerite, obviously not suspecting that Velva Linda had grown up as a boy. It was good. Velva Linda’s voice, her looks, her mannerisms were all perfectly feminine, and of course she would *not* disclose her secret to Marguerite.

“Uh—do you work around here?” Velva Linda asked, though she already knew.

“Yes, I’m a paralegal at Farquhar, Hardart & Frick, in the Big Black Block,” said Marguerite. She pointed to the Magnum Supreme Building on the other side of Semakoboomish Street, facing the cathedral and towering over it.

“Oh! Uh—I know someone who works there, who’s thinking about becoming a Catholic,” Velva Linda said. She didn’t mention that Pete was thinking about becoming a really *bad* Catholic.

“Oh, really?” Marguerite asked, her brown eyes wide, innocent-looking, and eager to know.

“Who’s that?”

“Uh, he’s an attorney named Pete Stigmire.”

Marguerite frowned in obvious disbelief. “Uh—well, that’s extremely surprising!” she said.

“Why is it surprising?” Velva Linda asked, as if she didn’t know.

“Well, his reputation is—uh—not so good. I mean, when it comes to women, you know.”

“Oh.” Velva Linda tried to think what to say. “Well, I guess you probably know more about his reputation than I do, working at the same firm. I’m an attorney too, but I’m at Grando, Nix & Fumus. But, you know, people’s reputations aren’t always accurate. And besides, people can change, like St. Augustine—or St. Genesisius.” Velva Linda didn’t know a lot about saints, but at least she did know that St. Augustine

had screwed and dumped some women before he became a saint. She felt a quick pang of guilt at the thought that she might be softening Marguerite's heart toward Pete and helping him get her into his grip. She hoped it wasn't true.

"Well, yes," Marguerite said thoughtfully. "Or St. Norbert." Evidently noticing the look of incomprehension on Velva Linda's face, she explained: "St. Norbert was a wealthy, worldly gentleman, until one day he was almost killed by a bolt of lightning. That really made him think about his life. He decided he was going in the wrong direction, so he completely turned his life around."

Velva Linda was pretty sure Pete wasn't going to turn *his* life around, even if he almost got killed by lightning—but she didn't say so to Marguerite. "Well," she said instead, "I guess if those saints could do it, maybe Pete could do it too."

"I hope he will, and I'll pray that he will, too," Marguerite said, "but, frankly, I am *not* going to hold my breath!"

Velva Linda laughed. "Yeah, I know what you mean," she said. Quickly recognizing her *faux pas* in suggesting that she knew more about Pete than she was letting on, she added: "I mean, not about *Pete* necessarily, but—well, you know, a lot of guys are like that. I mean, not so good when it comes to women."

"It's so hard to find any who aren't," Marguerite confided, "and who are good Catholics and, you know, *available*."

"Oh, yes!" Velva Linda sympathized. She looked at Marguerite, wondering why a pretty girl like her might find it hard to attract a suitable male admirer. Admittedly, her face was a bit odd—long and horsy-looking, with full lips and a disproportionately wide mouth—but it was not at all unpleasant to look at; far from it. She was quite tall and slender, and her

breasts seemed very small, even smaller than Velva Linda's own; perhaps men who fancied shorter, more buxom females wouldn't think her very attractive. Still, Velva Linda thought her lovely, and could easily see how Pete might think her lovely too.

"Um, I've heard of a website called Totally Catholic Singles," Velva Linda said, knowing already that Marguerite was seeking a man there. "I wonder if that's a good place to find a good Catholic man who's available."

"Well, I've wondered about that," Marguerite admitted. "I did meet a man there, an electrical engineer, who lives on Willow Mound and works for Magnum Supreme in the Big Black Block. He's a good Catholic, I guess, although he's awfully negative about the things and people he doesn't like in the Church—I mean, so-called liberals and wackos, and people like that. He doesn't have much of a sense of humor, either, if any, and I think I would find it really hard to get along with a man who had little or no sense of humor. What really disturbs me the most, though, is that he seems to be in an *incredibly terrific hurry* to get married. He seems to have fixed on me as the one he wants to marry, but I'm not quite sure why, unless it's because I did agree to go out with him, and I tried to be kind to him. He asked me to marry him not too long after we first met, and I told him this was awfully sudden and I'd have to think and pray about it, and do you know what he said? He actually said, 'Well, you shouldn't need to think for too long. I'm a good Catholic man; you're a good Catholic woman; what are we waiting for? I mean, as St. Paul says, it's better to marry than to burn!' That kind of gave me the creeps—almost as if he meant that, uh, lack of self-control was some kind of qualification for marriage! I really do *not* think that was what St. Paul meant!"

Velva Linda didn't know what St. Paul did mean, but the man sounded creepy to her too. "So did you tell him to get lost?" she asked.

“Well, I didn’t want to be unkind to him,” Marguerite said. “I’ve tried to tell him, in nice, discreet ways, that I think he’d do better to find someone else, but he doesn’t seem to be listening.”

“Is he stalking you, or something like that?”

“Well, I’m not sure I’d call it *stalking*. I mean, I don’t want to get him in trouble with the police, or anything like that. But he has been paying me some unwanted attention, and I’d really like him to stop.”

“Hmm.” Velva Linda was getting an idea, about how the man really might do better to find someone other than Marguerite, and it almost made her laugh out loud. “I wonder,” she said, “if I might attract him away from you. I mean, I know how to handle creeps. I guess maybe I’m not quite as tender-hearted as you. I wouldn’t have any problem with telling him to get lost in so few words, or with calling the police if he stalked me, either. And by that time, if he got fixated on *me*, maybe he would have forgotten all about *you*.”

Marguerite really did laugh out loud. “Oh, do you mean it?” she asked. “I couldn’t really wish him on you—but it *would* be such a relief to have him off my back! Do you really want to help me like that?”

“Sure I do,” Velva Linda assured her. “I can see you deserve somebody a lot better than him.”

She meant it. Marguerite’s kind heart was evoking an unexpectedly deep response from her own, almost as if she were still Vicente and not Velva Linda. She had to become Marguerite’s friend, her *very dear* friend, and she would do whatever it might take—even, perhaps, if it meant climbing Mount Everest herself.

“What’s this guy’s name, anyway?” Velva Linda asked.

“Roger Randwicke.”

“Well, OK, would you like to introduce me to him, and see if he thinks I’m at least as suitable a Catholic woman as you?”

“Oh, *yes!*” Marguerite exclaimed. “The sooner the better!”

Chapter 2

“Father, thanks so much for letting me go to confession by phone,” Roger Randwicke said to Father Cuthbert Reardon by phone early in the morning before work. “I know it may not be strictly according to canon law, but it’s *necessary*—and, as St. Thomas says, necessity knows no law.”

“He does indeed,” said the aging priest. “Certainly it would be preferable for you to confess to a priest in person—but, if you don’t find that to be feasible, it’s surely better to confess by phone than not at all, notwithstanding any canonical irregularity.”

“It sure is! Father, you’re the only priest I can really *trust*, and I can’t drive all the way out to Redrum now that they’ve sent you into exile there. The liberals and wackos, and their dupes and stooges, are in total control in this archdiocese. You know that; I know that. If I went to confession to one of *them*, they’d probably tell me my sins are no sins at all!”

“Perhaps some of them would,” the priest agreed in part, “though we should always avoid rash judgment and hasty over-generalization, as well as defamation. And now let’s proceed to your confession. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

“Bless me, Father, for I have sinned,” Roger said. “It’s been about two weeks since my last confession. Since that time, I masturbated on three occasions, while pretending I was engaging in the marriage act with a woman. I was plagued by impure thoughts about this woman almost every night, but I successfully resisted the temptation to masturbate on all but

those three occasions. I also indulged in a bit of gluttony on a couple of occasions, and I think I sometimes failed to speak out as forcefully as I should have done against sin and liberal lunacy, in discussions on the Internet. And I succumbed to distractions at Mass and at my prayers. I also wish to include in this confession all the sins of my whole life, especially any sins against purity.”

“Very well. Is there anything else?”

“Uh—not that I’m aware of.” Roger did not confess his temptations to indulge in girlish pretensions, a secret vice that had plagued him periodically since the age of 11—for those were only temptations, not sins, and he had conquered the temptations. He hoped he would always overcome them now, for he had become a fully, firmly manly man in thought, word, and deed. Once he was married, he was *sure* he would always overcome them, and indeed they would vanish forever—for his despair and anger at girls and women who ignored or snubbed him, which alone had led him to play the role of a girl and then a woman in strictest secrecy, would be gone.

“Might you need, perhaps, to confess some rash judgment and defamation?” Father Reardon prompted him, interrupting his thoughts of the girlish pretensions in which he would never again indulge.

“Uh—well—yeah, I guess maybe so.” Roger didn’t think he was really guilty of those sins, but he thought it best to go along with Father Reardon.

“Very well. For your penance, say three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys, that you may obtain the virtue of purity of mind and heart. Now make a good act of contrition.”

“O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, but most of all because they offend Thee, who art all good and worthy

of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life.”

Father Reardon said the words of absolution, followed by “Your sins are forgiven; go in peace.”

Roger said, “Thank you, Father.” Then he quickly added, “And now, please pray for the woman I love to make the right decision about marrying me. She’s a bit hesitant, but I’m pretty sure she’ll come around soon. She’s a really good Catholic, and I know she’ll make a great wife. I have to admit she’s not the most attractive girl I’ve ever seen, but her heart’s in the right place, and that’s the most important thing.”

“It is indeed,” Father Reardon agreed. “Man may look upon the outward appearance, but the Lord looks upon the heart, and He gives the blessings of marriage without regard to looks. Many women who are no glamor girls, to say the least, have given great happiness to their husbands and children.”

“Well, that’s what I need,” Roger said. “Thanks for your prayers.”

“I will indeed pray for her to make the right decision,” said Father Reardon.

After the call ended, Roger decided to call Marguerite almost at once. “Hey, Marguerite,” he said when she answered. “This is Roger. I was wondering if you’d like to go out to lunch today.”

“Oh, *yes!*” Marguerite said, with more than her usual enthusiasm. Roger was thrilled. Maybe Marguerite was coming around after all; maybe she would soon agree to marry him.

“Where would you like to go?” Roger asked.

“Oh, I always like The Decencies,” Marguerite said. “And it’s convenient to the Big Black Block, but it’s nicer than the employee cafeteria.”



“Great! Meet you there at about 12:10?”

“Yes. I’m looking forward to it.”

“Wow, me too!”

Roger arrived at The Decencies slightly before 12:10 and waited near the entrance for Marguerite. Soon she arrived, but she was not alone. Another young woman was with her—a medium-short, dark-haired, dark-eyed, golden-skinned bombshell.

“Uh—hi, Marguerite,” Roger said, rising to meet Marguerite and her companion. “It’s—uh—it’s great to see you again. But, um, I didn’t know you were going to bring anyone with you. I kind of thought it was going to be just you and me.” His eyes darted from Marguerite to the bombshell, again and again. The newcomer was incredibly beautiful and desirable-looking. Beside her, Marguerite looked far too pale and too skinny—and too tall, too, since she was a couple of inches taller than Roger.

“Well, you see,” said Marguerite, “this is my friend Velva Linda, and I brought her with me for a reason. She’s just returned to the sacraments, and she was wondering how to meet some good Catholics—including, maybe, a good Catholic *man*.” Marguerite gave Roger a big, winning smile, obviously suggesting that Roger himself was the good Catholic man Velva Linda would most like to meet.

What? *You—you brought this babe here to meet me?* Of course Roger didn’t say the words, but his mind was on fire with them. Still, he had to utter a mild protest: “Well, that’s great that she’s returned to the sacraments and all, but—you know, I kind of thought *you and I* might—uh—well, you know what I mean.”

“I do know what you mean,” Marguerite assured him, “but I really don’t think it would work out for you and me. I was hoping you wouldn’t be too terribly disappointed, but I thought—maybe Velva Linda

could help you not to be too disappointed. Do you think that might be true?”

Roger stared at the bombshell, who was actually smiling at him—and what a smile! His heart revved up at once, and his all-too-excitabile penis began to grow longer. His pride did feel a bit stung at being rejected by Marguerite—and yet he could easily imagine not being disappointed at all, if only this newfound beauty could be his.

“Uh, well, maybe,” Roger admitted. “Let’s sit down and order some food, and we can talk.”

They did just that, talking about Velva Linda’s return to the sacraments, Roger’s stout defense of the Catholic faith on the Internet, and much more. Before too long, Roger was totally smitten with Velva Linda and had almost forgotten about supposedly being in love with Marguerite. This newfound beauty was so sweet, so vivacious, and so attentive to him—*wow!* His heart and his six-inch penis, hidden beneath the table and his trousers, were closely united in singing Velva Linda’s praises. He was going to ask her to go out with him, and ask her to marry him before long, if she kept giving him encouragement like this.

Velva Linda was surprised, and pleased, to find that Roger didn’t seem creepy to her after all. He seemed like a fairly normal, chubby, bespectacled Catholic guy—whose seemingly excessive interest in marriage, she sensed, arose directly from his exceptionally strong desire for sex. It pleased and excited her to see him fixing his gaze on her, and to sense his strong fascination with her. She wondered if, unbelievably, he might even still be fascinated by her if he knew of her secret—which was now erect, extended to its full four inches inside her panties, beneath the table and her skirt.

By the end of their meal, Roger and Velva Linda were laughing and talking with great animation about anything and everything that came to mind, while Marguerite quietly looked on with fully visible satisfaction. “Well, Marguerite,” Roger said jovially as they got up, “you were right. This will be best for everyone.” Turning to Velva Linda, he said, “Velva Linda, do you think you might like to go out sometime? I mean, just you and me? Like maybe tomorrow evening?”

“Oh, *yes!*” Velva Linda said with sincere enthusiasm. She was actually starting to like Roger, though she was afraid of what might happen if he found out her secret. At least, she thought, he wouldn’t need to find out for a little while. She would play the good Catholic young lady, shy about sex but discreetly eager for marriage, and lead Roger on. At least it would help to distract her from any lingering craving she might feel for Pete, and from any lingering thoughts of the craving *he* might feel for Marguerite. After that—Velva Linda didn’t know what might happen, and right now she didn’t much care.

Roger and Velva Linda went out to dinner at Chez Elise, an expensive downtown restaurant with a romantic atmosphere. Roger wore a light gray suit with a light blue tie. Velva Linda wore a long royal blue dress with a slightly low neckline. Perhaps it was not quite low enough to be considered immodest, but she was well aware that the bare portions of her breasts—clothed only, beneath the dress, in a skimpy, lacy décolleté bra and an equally skimpy slip—would be distinctly visible if she happened to bend over.

She did happen to bend over as soon as she sat down to dine. Roger was pulling her chair out for her to sit down. He was standing to the side of the chair, not directly behind it, obviously in hope of catching a glimpse of Velva Linda’s breasts. She not only gave

him an eyeful, but looked up at him and smiled while he was staring down at them, making it clear that it was quite all right with her if he happened to glimpse her breasts.

His eyes bulged when he saw her smiling at him, before he ripped them away in embarrassment. She knew she was exciting him, and she was exciting herself by doing so. She felt a swift shock of surprise at the thought that, if she could, she was going to do exactly what Pete was hoping to do—to seduce a devout Catholic. Dismay at the thought flitted briefly through her mind, but then was gone, replaced by growing excitement and desire.

Roger soon turned the conversation to a topic of obviously immense interest to him. “Say, Velva Linda,” he said, “I hope it’s not too soon to mention this, but—well, I’m the kind of guy who *really needs* to get married, and I’m not going to beat around the bush about it. I’m looking for a good Catholic woman to marry, so—well, after we get to know each other better, I wonder if we might talk about whether that would be a good idea.”

Velva Linda laughed, but not unkindly. “Oh, Roger, this is so sudden!” she said, still laughing.

“But—well, frankly, I think I’m the kind of *woman* who really needs to get married too. I mean, well, I do have rather strong feelings that I, I’ve sometimes had trouble keeping under control; you know what I mean. I—uh—I don’t see any harm in admitting it.”

“Wow, neither do I!” Roger assured her. “It’s such a relief to be able to talk about it without beating off—I mean, beating around the bush!” Roger was blushing and sweating—most becomingly, in Velva Linda’s eyes—but still he went on. “And, speaking of not beating around the bush,” he said, “I guess I should mention that—well, I know you were away from the sacraments for a while, and—uh—I just wanted you to know that I wouldn’t consider it an obstacle to

marriage or anything if you were—uh—if you didn't happen to be a virgin any more."

"Oh, Roger, that's wonderful! That's such a great relief!" Velva Linda said, beaming brightly upon him. "I'm so glad you're willing to speak frankly about things like that! I guess—since you've said that, I guess it couldn't do any harm to admit I'm *not* a virgin." She demurely, shamefacedly looked away for a moment, but then gazed straight into Roger's eyes again. They were fixed intently on her. She sensed that he wished to hear more about her not being a virgin.

"In fact," she went on after hesitating, "I'm afraid I—I was committing fornication with a man pretty recently, before I decided it really had to stop and I had to—to try to be pure. I'm so *incredibly* glad you won't hold it against me!"

"No, I sure won't!" Roger said, putting his hand on hers. "I know how it is. I haven't always been pure either. I've never really done it with a woman, but I've, uh, pretended I was doing it. I've had to confess quite a bit of m—masturbation." He blushed more deeply and sweated more profusely.

"It's so *terribly* hard, isn't it, when your feelings are so strong?" Velva Linda sympathized. "I certainly couldn't hold *that* against you!"

"Hey, thanks," Roger said. "I'm glad we can be totally open about this stuff!"

By the end of the date, Roger was far from being finished with total openness about his feelings. "Wow, Velva Linda, this has been incredible," he said to her in his car in front of her apartment building on the Capitoline Hill. "Would you like to go out again soon?"

“Oh, yes, I’d love to!” Velva Linda assured him. “Really soon! Just say when, and where!”

“Well, how about a bike ride in, um, maybe Farquhar Park?” Roger might as well have come right out and said, “How about a hot make-out session?”—for Farquhar Park was the second most notorious park for making out in Pacific Heights. The most notorious was Grand Stimson Park, on the Capitoline Hill not too far from Velva Linda’s apartment, but that park was crawling with gays and lesbians, which was presumably why Roger didn’t want to go there.

“That sounds lovely,” Velva Linda said, “but I don’t have a bike any more.”

“You could rent one—or rather, I could rent one for you, at a bike shop in Farquhar Village.”

“Oh, thank you! Yes, I’d like that! Uh—how about bright and early this Saturday morning?” Velva Linda wanted it to be early enough that, if they happened to go too far in any make-out session that might occur, she would still have time to go to confession on Saturday afternoon.

“Excellent! Let’s do it!” When Roger said that, Velva Linda could not help thinking of “doing it” in the sexual sense, though of course she did not say so.

“And now,” Roger ventured to say, “Well, uh—I guess maybe you wouldn’t want to kiss a guy on your first date with him.”

“Oh, but this is our *second* date,” Velva Linda promptly volunteered with a big smile. “The first one was at The Decencies with Marguerite. So I *didn’t* kiss you on our first date.”

“Uh—then maybe on the second?” Roger slipped his arm around her shoulder and clasped her bare arm beyond.

“I think that would be very nice.” Velva Linda turned toward him, closed her eyes, and raised her lips. Roger’s lips met hers and lingered there, longer and longer. She let her tongue slip slightly between his lips; his tongue responded in kind. Soon their tongue-tips were licking each other rapidly and their breathing was heavy, though as yet their tongues had not plunged deeply into one another’s mouths. Roger put his other arm around Velva Linda, with his forearm touching the underside of her breast, and she did not resist him. Their tongues slid deeply into one another’s mouths, and Roger began to caress her breast through her clothing. Still she did not resist him. Far from it; she even pressed his hand to her breast with her own. She knew she was seducing him, and she could not feel sorry about it.

“Oh, Roger!” Velva Linda exclaimed at last, gasping for breath. “Please be careful! I’m afraid it’s far too easy for me to get carried away!”

“Me too,” Roger admitted. “I’ll be careful. I promise. I’ll try to—uh—treat you with all the respect and honor you deserve, and even more.”

Roger knew already, driving back to his little house on Willow Mound, that he would soon have another sin of masturbation to confess. Velva Linda was so incredibly exciting, and excitable! He just had to pretend, this very night, that she was his wife, and they were uniting in the marriage act.

He parked, entered the house, and stripped. Velva Linda was nude too in his fantasy, and in his arms. They kissed deeply on the mouth, and he caressed her bare breasts. His penis, fully six inches long, was erect and ready. He slipped his hand between Velva Linda’s thighs, touching her clitoris and her womanly opening, already wet and hot with love juice. She was as eager as he was. She lay on her back on Roger’s bed, lifting her knees, opening wide to him.

There was no difficulty at all, for she was not a virgin, and she knew well how to do this deed. Roger slipped his penis easily into her vagina in fantasy, while pressing it with both hands beneath him in reality. Her hips encouraged him boldly as his manly thrusts grew harder and faster. Roger had wondered whether it might be difficult, or even impossible, to bring Marguerite to orgasm if they were married; he had no such wonder with Velva Linda. She was ready, fully ready. Soon he was catapulting her into overwhelming orgasm and she moaned in ecstasy, while Roger ejaculated deep into her, perhaps even making her pregnant.

Roger too moaned, though not now in ecstasy. He was drained. He knew he had sinned. He would go to confession again by phone to Father Reardon. Still, he could not yet say the Act of Contrition. Worse yet, he could not even quite understand what had been wrong with this imitation act of love with a real, incredibly delectable woman—since he could not yet undergo the real experience, until they were married. Fervently he hoped there would be no needless delay before they were married.

Velva Linda, after saying good night to Roger and entering her apartment alone, was trying hard to imagine what it would be like to be a good, pure Catholic young lady. She found it awfully hard. Ever since she had first succumbed in secret to the potent allure of sexy girlishness when she was only 12 and her name was still Vicente, Velva Linda had hardly ever been pure in her life. She had tried sometimes during Lent, but not with complete success; the urge to engage in girlish masturbation had sometimes gripped her even then, though at least she had avoided actual sex with men until after Easter.

She got out of the clothes she had worn on the date and put on a nightgown. It was a fairly plain one, not one of her sexiest by any means, but still it was a bit

flimsy, and she could see her nipples sticking out beneath it. No doubt even a very good Catholic young lady wouldn't be able to keep her nipples from sticking out if she had just been on such an exciting date—but presumably she wouldn't *touch* her excited nipples, even briefly and delicately, as Velva Linda couldn't keep herself from doing now.

She sighed. It was hard to be pure, really hard. She had said so to Roger, and she had meant it. She touched her nipples again; this time she did not remove her hands. Soon she was stroking her whole breasts. This always made her secret grow erect, and it was rapidly doing so now.

She pressed her secret down into hiding between her legs, hoping to keep it under control, though she wasn't at all sure it would work. She wondered if good Catholic young ladies ever clutched their erect clitorises tightly between their legs, trying to keep unwanted sexy feelings under strict control. She placed the palms of her hands on the tops of her thighs and sat almost perfectly upright and motionless, trying to avoid doing anything that would excite her further.

Velva Linda's phone rang. She moved as little as possible while answering it. It was Pete.

"Hey, babe," Pete said. "How's the Everest expedition going?"

Velva Linda frowned. "Well, Marguerite trusts me," she said. "I think we're going to be good friends. She's very grateful to me for helping distract a gentleman who was paying unwanted attention to her." Velva Linda didn't mention that she herself wished to dump Pete in favor of the distracted gentleman, if only it were possible.

"Hey, that's excellent," Pete said. "Now you need to help her see that birth control is OK. That's key. The basic idea is that she needs to sympathize with *married women* whose husbands *absolutely need sex* even when it's a bad idea to have kids. You may recall

that, historically, that was how birth control was sold to millions of Christians of all kinds, including many Catholics. The idea was that it would save marriages, not promote fornication and adultery. Of course it was bullshit, but they were gullible enough to buy it. Once Marguerite has bought it, I'll move in and butter her up for the sex act."

This is backwards, Velva Linda couldn't help thinking. She didn't want Pete to seduce Marguerite, but she didn't think that would be the way to do it even if she did. She herself, in seducing Roger, wasn't starting by getting him to think it was OK to have sex with a girl who was really a guy underneath—quite the opposite! *First* he had to fall in love with her *without* knowing her secret, and only then would the secret be revealed to him. So why was Pete doing it the wrong way around? Why wasn't he first trying to get Marguerite to fall in love with him, and then, when she was weakened by her feelings for him, delicately trying to lead her to believe she needed birth control? Velva Linda had no idea—unless, perhaps, it was because Pete feared *he* would fall in love with *her*, abandon his plan of seduction, and want to marry her!

"Uh—Marguerite is very tender-hearted," Velva Linda said, "but I'm not sure she's all that gullible."

"If she's tender-hearted," Pete insisted, "she's *got* to be gullible. That's how reality *is*. If you fail to face reality in one way, like by being tender-hearted, then you'll fail to face it in another way too, like by being gullible. You think her tender heart will be able to stand the thought of men being tortured by unfulfilled needs, or women being tortured with remorse about failing to fulfill their husbands' urgent needs, when she's forced to face reality?"

"I don't know," Velva Linda said, even while hardening her own heart further against Pete's scheme of seduction.

"Well, find out. That's your assignment."

What if I don't? Velva Linda thought. *What are you going to do—dump me?* Yes, of course that was it. Pete was supremely confident in his control over Velva Linda, because he had known she was terrified he would dump her. Well, she wasn't going to be terrified any more. She was going to love Roger now, not Pete—knowing full well that she would have to seduce Roger away from any semblance of strict adherence to Catholic morality. She had seen that she could do it, and she would.

"I'll see what I can do," Velva Linda said noncommittally. She guessed she really would find out what Marguerite thought about birth control—but she would not try to push Pete's view on her.

"Good. Do it soon," said Pete. "I'll be seeing you."

The call ended. Velva Linda sat in silence. The one good thing about this conversation, she thought, was that it had caused her erection to diminish. That was good indeed, because now she would have some hope of not masturbating tonight. If she ever did happen to masturbate at night, she knew she could go to confession early in the morning at the cathedral—but she hoped it wouldn't be necessary. She was going to go all out, or at least almost all out, to be Marguerite's good Catholic friend. The only really big problem—which she had no idea how to solve—was that she was unable to be Roger's good Catholic wife as well, only his bad Catholic seductress.

Chapter 3

"So how did your date with Roger go?" Marguerite asked at once after Mass the next day. She was smiling broadly, and her eyes were bright with eager interest.

"Well, actually, it went pretty well, I thought," Velva Linda said. "He doesn't really seem creepy to

me after all. I actually kind of like him. But he does seem *incredibly* fascinated by the subject of marriage.”

“He didn’t ask you to marry him already, did he?” Marguerite laughed, but sounded a bit nervous.

“Well, no, but I could tell it was probably coming pretty soon.”

“Are you going to go out with him again?”

“Well, yes, I am.” Velva Linda felt herself blushing. “I mean—well, there are some things in my past—I’m ashamed to have to say this, but—I’m afraid I’m not a virgin any more. And Roger was—uh—kind enough to tell me that wouldn’t matter to him. I’m not sure there are a lot of good Catholic men who would say something like that. And—well, I don’t really think it would be fair for me to hold it against Roger if he’s also had some problems with not enough self-control. I mean—that *is* one of the good things about marriage, that it does help people, or it *can* help people who have that kind of problem. Do you know what I mean?”

Velva Linda was almost afraid to look up at Marguerite, but she did. Marguerite was looking at her thoughtfully. She too was blushing, though not as hotly as Velva Linda.

“I think so,” Marguerite said. “I’m sorry for you—I mean, about your past. I guess Roger might even be the right man for you. I just know he’s not the right one for *me*.”

“Well, I hope you’ll find the right man for you, too,” Velva Linda said. “You deserve a really great one.”

“Or even if I don’t deserve it, maybe God will give me a really great one anyway!” Marguerite laughed. Velva Linda’s heart was touched. She hoped Marguerite would indeed find a really great man, whoever he might be.

The thought of a really great man somehow made Velva Linda think, by contrast, of Pete—and of Pete’s “assignment” for her. She had no inclination to carry out the assignment, but she did wonder what Marguerite thought about birth control. In the course of her rather bad Catholic upbringing, Velva Linda had pretty much always assumed birth control was OK, no matter what old men who didn’t need it said—but she was pretty sure Marguerite wouldn’t think it was OK, and she wondered why.

“Say, Marguerite, I was wondering,” Velva Linda said, “what do you think about birth control? I mean, I know the Church is against it, but what do *you* think?”

“Why do you ask?” Marguerite said. “Roger didn’t tell you he wanted you to use birth control after you were married, if you did marry him—did he?”

“Oh, no!” Velva Linda said. “But—well, I just wondered, because some people say it’s necessary, like if your husband, uh, absolutely needs sex but it wouldn’t be a good idea to have a baby.”

“That sounds like something a man like *Roger* would say,” Marguerite said, “I mean, if he wasn’t a faithful Catholic. He absolutely needs sex, so his wife has to let him use her as a—a sex toy on demand, and shut God out of it because God gives nasty, expensive babies. If he faithfully prayed for the grace to be more considerate of his wife, and of God, he’d find himself backing off from his false claim that he absolutely needs sex while he can’t endure babies. Real love isn’t about demanding sex while rejecting babies.” A hint of fierceness actually flashed through Marguerite’s soft brown eyes for a moment, but then was gone.

“Can you tell I have a personal interest in this question?” Marguerite then asked. Her wide smile returned, even more brightly than before. “I’m the last of eight kids in my family. If my parents had used birth control, I wouldn’t be here.”

Velva Linda stared. The thought of Marguerite not being here—of there being nothing but a void, a vacuum, thin air and nothing else, where Marguerite now stood so full of life—struck and shocked Velva Linda like a sudden sharp slap in the face. She rejected the unbearable thought at once. Marguerite *was* here, thanks be to God—yes, to God!—and Velva Linda was already coming to love her deeply. Velva Linda’s heart, indeed, was starting to yearn desperately for something that could never be.

“Well, uh, I’m very glad your parents didn’t use birth control,” Velva Linda stammered.

“So am I!” Marguerite grinned. “Would you like to meet them? I mean, you’d be welcome to come out to Mass with my family on Sunday, at St. Therese’s in Beaconsfield.”

“Oh! Uh—sure! That would be great!” Velva Linda’s mind was filled, all of a sudden, with strange, irrational fantasies of her still being Vicente after all, of her being invited to meet Marguerite’s parents because Vicente and Marguerite were falling in love and were thinking about marriage. Her heart was aching, almost unbearably, at the knowledge that these were nothing but fantasies, no closer to reality than Marguerite herself would have been if her parents had used birth control. Of course she could never speak of this to Marguerite—but at least she could try, with all her heart, to be Marguerite’s dear, good, faithful Catholic friend. The only really big problem was that, when she was with Roger again, she would tend to forget all about Marguerite.

Saturday had arrived at last. With his bike on the rack on the back of his car, Roger had transported the lovely, eager Velva Linda from her apartment to the Wheel Well, a big bike shop in Farquhar Village that rented bicycles as well as sold them. Velva Linda had selected a pink 21-speed bike and a matching

helmet. Now they were riding slowly uphill into Farquhar Park. Roger was pretty sure he was going to have more sins to confess, but he absolutely couldn't resist the opportunity to come here with Velva Linda.

He looked at her as she rode beside him. Her looks were stunning. Her short, plump, but shapely legs, in shorts perhaps a bit too short to be strictly modest, were so beautiful he could hardly take his eyes off them to look up at her breasts and her face—and yet he did. Her breasts, small but perfectly formed, pressed firmly outward against her form-fitting pink top, fixing Roger's eyes upon them almost (but not quite) without his consent. Her neckline, likewise perhaps a bit too low for perfect modesty, was showing a tiny bit of cleavage, just enough to inflame Roger's eyes with desire to see more, and to feel more too. Her smiling face, framed between girlish twin ponytails, was turned toward him almost as often as toward the road ahead.

Sweating and breathing hard, they arrived in due time at a hilltop bench mostly surrounded by trees, but with a good view of the ocean. They deposited their bikes and sat down. Velva Linda sat very close to Roger. This, he thought, was a very good sign.

Tenderly he put his arm around her waist. She responded in kind, and leaned her head on his shoulder. For a few moments they breathed together in silence.

"Isn't this great?" Roger said, looking out toward the ocean. "Looking all the way out to the horizon, it's kind of like looking forward to our whole lives—together."

"Oh, yes!" Velva Linda murmured. Her leg was touching Roger's all the way from her hip to her knee. Keeping her head on his shoulder, she moved to embrace him with both arms. "Roger, I'm so incredibly glad you're willing to forget about—absolutely *everything* in my past when I wasn't, uh, what a good Cath-

olic woman should be. I can still hardly believe it. You really *are* willing, aren't you?"

"I'm more than willing," Roger assured her, and he meant it. He was going to ask her to marry him soon, really soon.

He kissed Velva Linda on the forehead, the only part of her face that was yet accessible. "I love you, Velva Linda," he said. "You're exactly the woman I've always dreamed of."

She looked up to him with wide, bright, love-filled eyes. "Oh, Roger, I love you," she murmured.

Their lips met. This time their tongues took the plunge with little delay. Roger's hand was on Velva Linda's breast through her clothes before the long kiss ended. Her thighs were clenched tightly together. He was pretty sure that meant she was getting sexually excited, as he was. His penis was already hard within his trousers. He knew he would have to go to confession again after this—and yet he was way too hot to stop.

Velva Linda was breathing hard. "Roger, I'm afraid I'm getting too excited," she admitted. "But do you—do you want to go just a little bit farther?" Without waiting for him to answer, she slipped her arm back from around his waist and put both her hands up inside her pink top. Roger's eyes bulged as he saw what she was doing: unhooking her bra from the front under her top.

Roger couldn't refuse. "Well—maybe just a little bit," he said. His hands were trembling terrifically as he reached up under her top with both of them to push her unhooked bra out of the way and caress her bare breasts. Her nipples were fully erect. She gasped in pleasure as he touched them, and so did he. Roger had never felt a woman's nipples before. His penis was sizzling, and pre-ejaculation fluid was oozing out of it already.

“We’re going to have to go to confession,” Roger admitted. “But we can’t stop now. Can you *help* me, Velva Linda? Do you know what I mean?” Gingerly he took her hand and moved it to touch his penis through his trousers.

“Yes, I know what you mean,” Velva Linda murmured. “I can help you. I’m sorry for getting you too excited.”

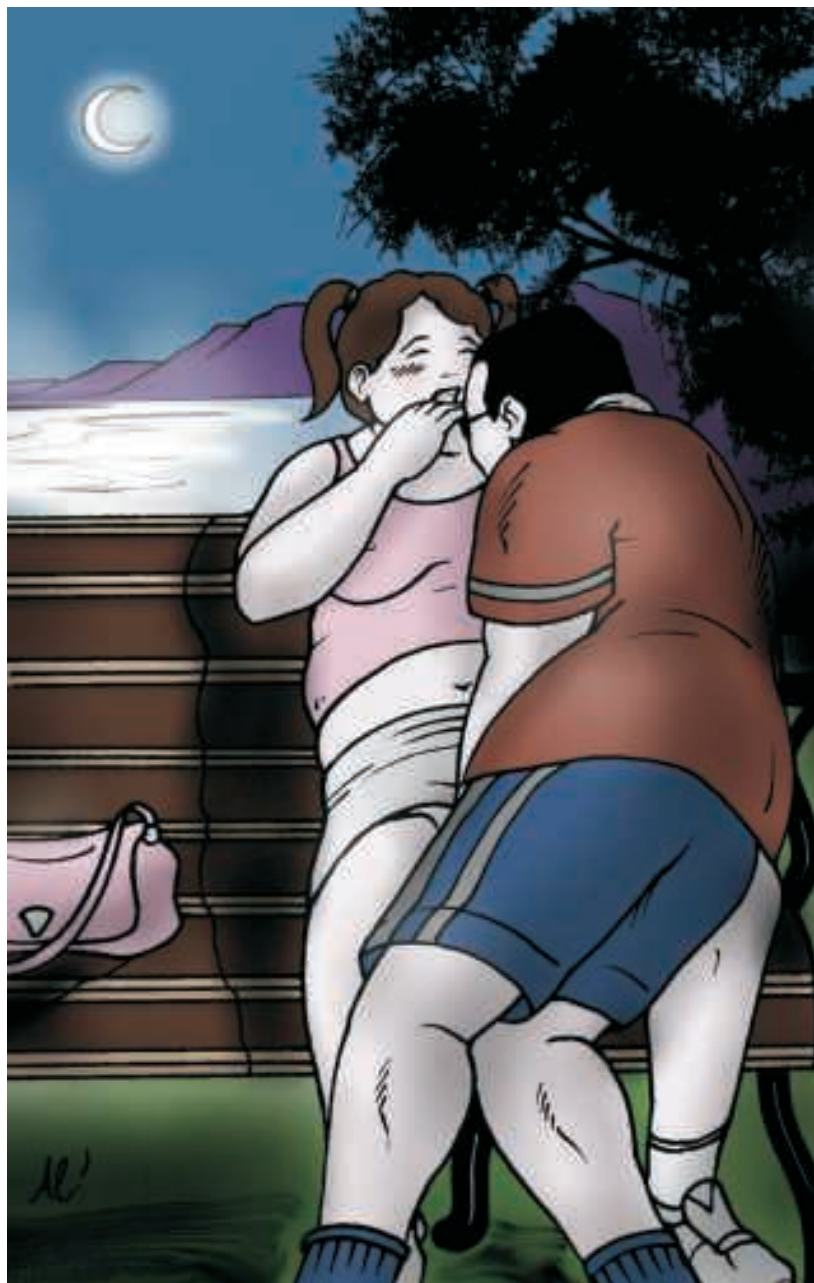
“Oh, it’s not your fault!” Roger assured her. “I’m afraid I’m just getting carried away! I’m even—I’m even wanting to touch you *down here*, if you’ll let me.” He pointed toward the junction of her thighs, still tightly clenched together.

“Yes. Yes, I’ll let you—if you really love me, in spite of absolutely *everything* in my past,” Velva Linda said. “Here. Please touch me.” She took his hand and guided it into her shorts.

Roger was afraid he was going to ejaculate before his hand even reached its destination. He slipped it into her shorts at once and slid it down, into her panties, down into her thick forest of pubic hair, down farther to slip his finger into her warm, wet womanly opening.

He slipped his hand down farther, then farther still. There was no womanly opening. There was only something he could hardly have imagined, something hard hidden between Velva Linda’s thighs, far thicker than any real woman’s clitoris could be, and so long that it was sticking out of her panties and her shorts beneath her thighs, though it was shorter than Roger’s penis.

“Uh—what’s this?” Roger moaned weakly, though he could tell quite well what it was. Was *this*, he wondered, his only reward for manfully resisting all temptations to indulge in girlish pretensions: to be in love with a male indulging, most successfully and thrillingly, in the very same pretensions? Was *this* what God had given him in return for his best efforts



at faithfulness and manliness? Was this—Roger could not force himself to refrain from thinking—was this God’s idea of a *funny joke*?

“It’s my secret,” Velva Linda said. “My—my clitoris. I know it’s way too gigantic—but I hope it won’t scare you away from me!” She unzipped his trousers, extracted his erect penis, and stroked it devotedly with one hand, while still pressing Roger’s hand against her secret in her shorts with the other. “Oh, Roger, thank you so much for loving me, in spite of *absolutely everything*—even my secret, and my past life as a—*a boy!*”

“Oh, my God,” Roger moaned. It wasn’t the beginning of the Act of Contrition. He was about to ejaculate in Velva Linda’s hand. He couldn’t stop merely because this lovely lady had a gigantic clitoris that was obviously a short, stout penis with a big, plum-like bulb. She was shamelessly fulfilling what he had only dreamed of, in shame and secrecy—and his fascination with her was exploding into orgasm now that he knew what she really was.

“Can you help me with my secret, Roger?” Velva Linda murmured, rubbing his hand harder against it.

“Uh—uh—*ohhhh! My GOD!!*” Roger groaned as he ejaculated into Velva Linda’s bare hand.

“Yes! I’ll help! You need it as much as I do! Oh, Velva Linda, I love you—in spite of everything!” He rubbed her clitoris harder and harder, then cupped his hand over her hot swollen bulb, as her semen spurted into his bare hand underneath her tight-clenched thighs, just as his had done into hers above his trousers.

“I hope you’re not mad at me,” Velva Linda softly said while wiping Roger’s semen off her hand with a tissue. “I mean, you know, for—leading you on, and, uh, letting you find out how big my clitoris is.”

“Well, uh—it was the biggest surprise of my life,” Roger said. He wondered if he should tell all. It would be terrifically embarrassing, but no more embarrassing than what he had already done.

“I guess I have to admit,” he reluctantly went ahead and said, “you’re not the only one who’s, uh, pretended to be a girl. I used to do it too, but I quit. I only did it in secret, though, and—uh—never with anyone else. It was only because I didn’t have a real girl, so I—I decided I needed to be my *own* girl.”

“I know what you mean,” Velva Linda said. “That was how I started out too. It was several years before I dared to appear—uh—like a girl in public.”

“Well, I’m not going to appear like a girl in public, *ever*,” Roger said. “I mean, maybe it’s all right for *you*, but I’m a real man now, and I’m going to *stay* a real man.”

Roger’s hand, slippery with semen, was still on Velva Linda’s bulb, his forearm between her thighs. Being a real man, and no gay, he knew he should *not* be having such good feelings about touching what, in reality, was a man’s penis—but his feelings had gotten the better of him, and they were not letting go. What was more, he really did love Velva Linda—and he couldn’t stop loving her merely because she had a big clitoris and no vagina.

“I guess it’s time to go to confession again,” Roger said. He was going to have a whole lot of trouble, he knew, with firmly resolving not to sin with Velva Linda again. He wasn’t at all sure he could honestly do it.

“Yes,” Velva Linda agreed. “We really should—uh—at least *try* to keep from getting carried away like that!”

“I did try,” Roger muttered. “I tried *hard*. It didn’t work.” He wondered if it would ever work. He was even wondering, with extreme dismay, whether it *should* work. He didn’t tell Velva Linda, though. First

he had to get away from her and think, really think, about what he should do. He would get away from her, but first he had to release her big, beautiful bulb—and it was taking him a dismayingly long time to bring himself to release it.

“Bless me, Father, for I have sinned,” Roger said again to Father Reardon by phone, soon after he dropped Velva Linda off at her apartment and returned to his little house. He knew he had only imperfect contrition for his sin with her—he still had to think of the lovely lady as *her*, despite what he now knew about her big clitoris and her ability to ejaculate in his hand. He hoped and prayed that his imperfect contrition would be good enough.

“It’s been a little less than a week since my last confession,” Roger said. “Since that time, on one occasion I engaged in solitary masturbation after I went on a—a date, and on one occasion I engaged in—uh—mutual masturbation with a person I thought was a woman, but who turned out to be a—a man. I didn’t stop when I found out the person was really a man.” He also wished to include in this confession all the sins of his whole life, especially any sins against purity. Even as he said the words, he felt strong fear that his desire for Velva Linda would soon overcome his resolution to sin no more. Still, he expressed the resolution, said the Act of Contrition, and received absolution.

Then he was alone. He was deathly afraid he would always be alone—and perhaps he would even succumb again to his dreaded secret girlish pretensions—unless he gave in to his love and desire for Velva Linda. It was wrong. She was not really a woman. It was not God’s will, for there could be no offspring from such a union. He told himself so, but he feared he was ceasing to believe it. He looked at the little crucifix on his wall; he began to cry as he tried to offer up his sufferings in reparation for sins

and for the conversion of sinners, with no firm assurance that he was succeeding.

“Bless me, Father, for I have sinned,” Velva Linda said that afternoon in the confessional at St. Thomas More Church on the Capitoline Hill. “It’s been about a week since my last confession. Since that time, on one occasion, I engaged in mutual masturbation with a man. And on one other occasion I engaged in, uh, petting and tongue-kissing with him.” She also confessed a few dip-shitty little venial sins, said the Act of Contrition, received absolution, said her three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys for penance, and was out of there. She had a pretty strong feeling that she might have more of the same sometime to confess, if she did choose to confess—but at least she did resolve not to do any more of the same—as of now.

She wondered whether Roger would really still keep loving her, now that he knew her secret. She hoped he would. She did love Roger, as she had said, though they had known each other only briefly. Velva Linda’s heart had always been more than eager enough for love, though most often it had been unrequited love. Even with Pete it had really been unrequited, though they had made love hundreds of times. If Roger really loved Velva Linda, she would not readily let him go.

Still, the time to decide for sure had not yet come. Velva Linda had gone to confession, she was going to try again to be a good Catholic, and she was going to meet Marguerite’s family tomorrow. She hoped she wouldn’t turn out to be living a double life—but she was gripped by growing fear that she would be doing exactly that, and indeed that she already was.

Chapter 4

Velva Linda figured it would be more restful to take the trolley-bus out to Beaconsfield rather than drive, so she did. The bus dropped her off on Beaconsfield Road a few blocks from St. Therese's. She walked through the quiet neighborhood, filled with neat, modest-looking homes, until she arrived at the church. It was not nearly as beautiful as the cathedral of St. Thomas More, but it was almost as big.

She entered through the wide double doors and came face-to-face with two larger-than-life reproductions of black and white photographs. One showed a really cute, smiling teenage girl in Victorian-looking clothes; the other showed a young nun in a habit. Velva Linda looked closely at their faces. They were the same person—quite evidently St. Therese herself. She wondered why such a good-looking girl, surely no reject in the eyes of young men, would have decided to become a nun.

She went to the ladies' rest room. Upon checking her looks in the mirror, she found them quite satisfactory. Her long dark hair was brushed straight back, and she wore a pretty, springlike straw hat. Her dress was light, high-necked, knee-length, and girlish, with little flowers printed all over it. Bare legs and sandals completed the look of a good, simply and modestly dressed, eminently decent Catholic young lady.

People were gathering for Mass when Velva Linda emerged from the rest room. She went in and sat in a pew near the back of the church. She knew she would not see Marguerite until afterward, for Marguerite would be singing in the choir.

The choir was good. Velva Linda, who had a pretty fair singing voice herself, could readily imagine herself singing in it—if only she lived with Marguerite. She wished she did, and felt sad at the thought that it wasn't going to happen.

Velva Linda actually paid some attention at Mass today. She even listened to the sermon—at least to the part beginning where the priest quoted the words of St. James, “A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.” They hadn’t been in the readings for today, at least she didn’t think they had. The priest, a handsome young man whose decision for the priesthood seemed as inexplicable as St. Therese’s decision for nunhood, was preaching about the need to be a whole-hearted, totally committed Catholic. Velva Linda wistfully tried to imagine herself being one, although she knew she wasn’t—at least not yet, and maybe she never would be.

The thought that she wasn’t one, unlike Marguerite who was, made her sad. Velva Linda even prayed to God to help her be a more faithful Catholic—to be worthy of Marguerite’s friendship, and maybe even of God’s. She tried, with some but not total success, to eject all thoughts of what she and Roger might do when they were next together—if Roger still loved her, despite what he now knew about her.

Velva Linda had never been very good at ejecting distractions of any kind at Mass, and she still wasn’t, despite her unusual attentiveness to the sermon. Almost before she knew it, most of the Mass was over; she was praying the Our Father, and then shaking hands with some people she didn’t know. Then she received Holy Communion and knelt to try to pray, but the thought of Marguerite kept intruding into her prayers.

Soon Marguerite herself appeared after Mass. She wore a high-necked, knee-length dress that looked a bit like Velva Linda’s, except it was light blue and didn’t have flowers on it, and of course it was a different size. “Hi, Velva Linda!” she called out, approaching Velva Linda with a big, wide smile. Then she did something she almost certainly wouldn’t have done if she had known of Velva Linda’s secret: she gave her a hug. Velva Linda could feel Marguerite’s little breasts pressing against her through their clothes—only for a couple of seconds in reality, but much longer in de-

lightful memory. She even seemed to feel Marguerite's tender heart, which ignited her own with yearning to grow ever closer, to know Marguerite ever better.

"Come and meet my parents!" said Marguerite, leading Velva Linda through the thinning crowd of worshippers. Velva Linda followed close behind, clinging closely to her femininity which was the ticket entitling her to enter Marguerite's circle of friends, but all the while being assailed by urgent yearning to love Marguerite as a man loves a woman.

"This is my dad, Dr. Andrew Rougemont," Marguerite said, "and this is my mom, Madeleine Rougemont." She introduced a tall, pale, light-haired, long-faced man and a short, ruddy, dark-haired, wide-mouthed woman. "This is my friend Velva Linda Buenazno," she went on, "who's just recently returned to the sacraments."

"Hello, Velva Linda, I'm very glad to meet you," said Dr. Rougemont, smiling slightly and shaking her hand.

"Oh, I'm so glad to meet you!" said Mrs. Rougemont with much more enthusiasm, grasping Velva Linda's hand in both her own. "You've just returned to the sacraments? That's wonderful! Would you like to come to Sunday dinner with us and tell us all about it?"

"Uh, yes, I'd like that very much," Velva Linda said, though she was pretty sure she wasn't going to tell exactly *all* about it. She wanted to be where Marguerite was, to see Marguerite smile upon her, to rejoice in her fast-growing confidence that Marguerite actually cared for her as a dear friend—unlike Pete, and perhaps unlike Roger too. If Marguerite was going to be at Sunday dinner with her family, that was where Velva Linda wanted to be too.

Dr. Rougemont drove them to the family home on a hill about a mile southeast of the church. It looked

big, well suited for a family of 10. “We’ve got a lot more room here than we need, now that all the children but Marguerite have moved out,” Mrs. Rougemont said. “And maybe she’ll be moving out sometime too. I know she’d like to find somebody, but it’s hard to find just the right one—especially nowadays, when there are so few really good Catholic men available.”

“I know what you mean,” Velva Linda said, “but I—I just can’t believe none of the few really good ones would be interested in Marguerite. I mean, she’s so kind, and, uh—so nice-looking, and so faithful to—you know—everything she should be faithful to. I know she’s got really high standards, but—well, there must be *somebody* out there who could meet them.” Velva Linda hoped, with all her heart, that it was true. She only wished her heart wouldn’t keep stabbing her with the idiotic, incredible, impossible notion that she herself, in her secret identity as Vicente, might be the one to leap over Marguerite’s high standards and into her heart forever.

“Velva Linda, you’re so sweet,” Marguerite said, touching Velva Linda’s shoulder and giving her a thrill of delight. “Thank you so much for saying that.”

“Uh—any time,” Velva Linda said with a smile almost as wide as Marguerite’s.

Soon dinner was served, and Mrs. Rougemont turned her entire attention to Velva Linda. “Now please tell us everything,” she said. “I pray every day for the conversion of sinners, and I just love to find out about the answers to my prayers!”

“Well, I’ve certainly been a sinner,” Velva Linda said truthfully. “I knew I wasn’t happy, but I wasn’t sure what to do about it. Then someone wanted me to help him commit a—a really *terrible* sin. I was shocked, in spite of everything I’d done. I didn’t want to do anything like that, and I wanted to keep that sin from happening—but I knew I couldn’t do it if I kept on sinning myself. I knew I had to return to the sac-

raments—so I did.” That was good, Velva Linda thought. It was all true, even if it wasn’t quite the *whole* truth.

“Oh, thanks be to God!” said Mrs. Rougemont. “Were you raised Catholic?”

“Well, yes,” Velva Linda said, “but not a very good Catholic. And my parents didn’t send me to Catholic school or anything.” She grimaced at the memory of the evils of Crispus Attucks High School, probably the worst school in the entire Pacific Heights public school system, which she had been forced to attend.

“Have you been going to daily Mass now?” Mrs. Rougemont asked.

“Yes, I go to midday Mass at the cathedral. That’s where I met Marguerite.”

“Oh, I’m so glad! I know Marguerite hasn’t found it easy to make friends downtown. You know, she’s always friendly, or at least polite, to everyone there, but a lot of the people there just don’t have the same interests or—the same *character* as she does.”

“Yes, I know. It’s really sad. I’m an attorney, and—uh—I know a lot of attorneys don’t have very good character, at least in their personal lives. In fact, some of them have really *bad* character.” She didn’t think she should mention Pete’s name, but of course she was thinking of him.

“Oh, well, I’m so glad you’re not one of *those* attorneys any more!” Mrs. Rougemont beamed upon Velva Linda, and so did Marguerite, to Velva Linda’s extreme delight. Even the reserved Dr. Rougemont smiled slightly.

“So am I,” Velva Linda said, and she actually meant it. “And I’m so glad I’ve met Marguerite. She’s a—a great friend.”

Marguerite’s smile grew even wider. Velva Linda’s heart was pounding hard at the sight of her, far

harder than any good Catholic woman's heart should pound at the sight of even the dearest female friend. Additional insane, idiotic thoughts attacked her, thoughts of ripping off her female attire and revealing herself as secretly a male, no doubt to the chagrin and horror of Marguerite and her parents.

It could not happen; it *must* not happen. It was impossible. Velva Linda must remain a woman, a dear woman friend for Marguerite. Her heart still pounding, she looked again at Marguerite—so kind, so pure, so simply good, she made Velva Linda think of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Still, Velva Linda could not eject the thought that, unlike Mary, Marguerite did not wish to remain a virgin forever—if only she could find the right man to love, honor, and cherish her for all her life.

Roger's solitary agony had not ended. He had gone to Sunday Mass, but he was not sure how he could honestly go again. He was afraid, deathly afraid, that all he had been taught and believed about love and marriage was wrong.

He knew full well what he should say and do, if he were still to be a faithful Catholic. He should say and do exactly what he himself had confidently, even brashly, advised gays and lesbians to do, in discussions on the Internet. He should make a clean break, tell Velva Linda they must not see each other any more, and live a chaste life with the help of God's grace. He should—he shuddered to think of it, and tried to fix his eyes more firmly on the crucifix on the wall of his lonely little house—he should reject the only real, warm, flesh-and-blood woman who had ever loved him, merely because she would not be recognized as a woman by those who knew her secret!

Deep doubts, long thrust into hiding beneath the surface of his mind, began to re-emerge and plague him. Why had God made him with such intense de-

sires for love and for sexual intimacy, if they might never be fulfilled? Why had he been overwhelmed with the urge to masturbate to orgasm while imagining himself uniting with a wife—and sometimes even imagining himself *being* the wife—beginning when he was only 11 years old, far too young for marriage? Why was he one of millions, perhaps billions throughout history, who must endure the suffering of being unable to fulfill his urgent needs in the manner supposedly prescribed by God—a kind of suffering that Jesus Christ Himself had never endured, for he was free from all concupiscence?

Roger groaned in misery. He would make the clean break, he told himself, if only he could be fully convinced it was right—but he could not. If he could, he would tell Velva Linda goodbye, never to meet her again, perhaps to spend his whole life alone—but it was not *good* for a man to be alone! God Himself had said that! Roger knew it was true, in the deepest core of his heart! If he defied God's word and his own deepest needs about *that*, how could he have any certainty about anything at all in this world?

He could not. He was doomed—unless everything he had been taught and believed about sex, and spouted on the Internet, was wrong. To have any hope of life, of love, of blessed union with the woman of his dreams, he must reject the old and strike out in search of the new.

“Velva Linda, I love you,” he murmured, though Velva Linda was not there. He gave a deep, sad sigh, but his decision was made. He would love Velva Linda; he would unite with her; he would not confess it as a sin, for he could no longer honestly believe that it *was* a sin. Still, he would not cease to believe in God; he would only discern God's will for himself, with all the genuine help God had given him, not including the age-old teachings he was now rejecting. God's will, as he discerned it, would be that he and Velva Linda would make love, full ecstatic love, and their joy would be complete. They would do it soon.

He would only wait until he was again bursting with sperm—not many nights from now.

Chapter 5

“Babe, I need a report on the Everest expedition,” Pete told Velva Linda by phone one evening, a couple of days after she had met Marguerite’s parents. “I haven’t heard anything for several days. Did you force her to face reality about birth control yet?”

“I talked with her about it,” Velva Linda said, “but I’m pretty sure she’s never going to accept birth control.”

“God damn it!” Pete ejaculated. “You didn’t even *try hard* to persuade her!”

“No, I didn’t!” Velva Linda retorted. “And I’m not going to! I’ve had it with your Everest expedition! You’ve lost your grip on me, Pete! I’m in love with somebody else now, it’s over between us, and I’m not going to help you try to screw Marguerite and throw her in the trash!”

“You bitch from hell,” Pete snorted. “Well, I don’t need you. There was a guy who actually climbed Mount Everest alone. I can do it too. I’m going to *accomplish* this—even if I actually have to act like a devout Catholic to do it.”

“I’ll warn her against you,” Velva Linda struck back. “I’ll let her know exactly what a filthy, disgusting hypocrite you are.”

“You just try it,” Pete said, “and I’ll expose you for what *you* are. You think she’ll still want to be your friend when she finds out what you really are? Hell, no!”

Velva Linda feared he was right, but she could not back down now. “Pete, don’t do this,” she begged. “Give Marguerite a chance to be a— a good wife, for somebody—not a screw product for the trash heap.”

“A *good wife*?” Pete snapped. “Hog shit! Bull fuck! That’s got nothing to do with *reality*! I know how to face reality, even if you don’t! I know what reality *means*! It means *fucking, blowing, beating off, and dumping*! It means telling people who dream about a good wife, or a good husband, to *fuck off*! I’ve known that since I was a kid! If you don’t know it, that just means you’ve got to be forced to face reality too!”

“Pete, you’re nuts,” Velva Linda informed him. “Please just stop it. Marguerite will never, ever accept you.”

“That’s what you think,” Pete said. “I’m going to succeed. You can’t stop me. So stay the hell out of my fucking way!”

“No, Pete,” Velva Linda said. “If I find out you’re trying to make a move on her, I’m going to warn her against you.” Deep shame and fear invaded her heart at the knowledge of how Pete could retaliate against her—and of how Marguerite would surely stop being her friend if he did. Still, she could not back down. She must try her best to protect Marguerite from Pete, at all costs—even the outrageous, exorbitant cost of never seeing Marguerite again.

Almost at once after her call from Pete ended, Velva Linda felt she needed to call Marguerite. Pete might even be thinking of beginning the attack on Marguerite right after midday Mass tomorrow. Velva Linda had to warn her before then.

“Well, hello!” Marguerite said when Velva Linda called. “Long time no hear!” She laughed. “What’s going on?”

“Marguerite, you remember how I was telling your mom that somebody tried to get me to help him commit a really terrible sin?”

“Well, sure. I was wondering about that, but I wasn’t sure I needed to know what it was.”

“Well, you do need to know. The person was Pete Stigmire, and the sin was—seducing you.”

“*What? Are you serious?*”

“I’m afraid so. He wanted me to get you to trust him, and persuade you that birth control was OK, so then he could move in and—uh—try to get you to sin with him. He was thinking I might go along with it, but this evening I told him I certainly wasn’t—so he said he was going to do it without my help. The idea was that he was going to gain your confidence by pretending he was interested in becoming a Catholic. I thought he might even begin the attack after midday Mass tomorrow, so I thought I’d better warn you before then.”

“Oh.” Marguerite was silent for many seconds. “Well,” she said at last, “thank you very much for warning me. I’ll certainly take notice, and be on my guard, if Pete tries anything like that. I mean, of course, if he started *sincerely* wanting to be a Catholic—like St. Genesius—I’d be very glad, although I still don’t think I’d be likely to fall in love with him. But if it’s all just hypocrisy—well, then, *woe to you hypocrites!*”

Pete did attend midday Mass the next day, although he sat toward the back of the cathedral, well behind Marguerite and Velva Linda. He intercepted them just beyond the door.

“Well, hello, Marguerite!” he said, ignoring Velva Linda as if he didn’t know her. “I was thinking I might see you here. I’ve actually been thinking about becoming a Catholic, and I was wondering if you can give me some help.”

“Well, I’m very glad to hear that,” Marguerite said politely. “But I think you really need to talk with one

of the priests here. They could help you much better than I could.”

“I’m not so sure about that,” Pete said, putting on his most ingratiating manner. Velva Linda grimaced, but turned her face away so Pete wouldn’t see.

“That’s a priest’s *job*,” Pete said, “but it’s not yours. I’m thinking you might actually be able to give me a better idea of why I should become a Catholic, if I should—because you stick with it even though it’s *not* your job, and you could leave at any time if you so desired.”

“That’s true of a lot of other people, too,” Marguerite countered. “My friend Velva Linda here, for example. I believe you’re already acquainted with her.”

“Hello, Pete,” Velva Linda said, as sweetly and innocently as possible.

“Well, hello,” Pete said. “Sure I know Velva Linda.” He looked as if he wished he could say some nasty things that would repel Marguerite from Velva Linda, if only he weren’t afraid they would also repel Marguerite from *him*.

“Velva Linda has just recently returned to the sacraments,” said Marguerite. “She would be an excellent person to help you begin to learn why you should become a Catholic, if you’re really interested.” Marguerite’s eyes silently begged Velva Linda to help get Pete off her back, as she had already helped get Roger off it. Velva Linda picked up on the suggestion at once.

“Yes, I’d love that!” Velva Linda said. “Oh, Pete, it’s so great to be a—a really *faithful* Catholic! I mean, I’m still not the world’s most devout Catholic or anything, but I’m so much happier even just *trying* to be a faithful Catholic than I was before! I’d be glad to talk with you about anything you want to know, and if I don’t know the answers to all your questions I’ll find them out! Just say when you’d like to talk!”

Pete frowned, but quickly tried to look like he wasn't frowning. "Well, all right," he said. "Maybe all three of us can talk about it."

"No, Pete, I really don't think that would be a good idea," Marguerite said. "Please leave me out of it."

Now Pete was glaring in outrage, straight at Velva Linda. Pete was smart. He could see exactly what was going on. Velva Linda had betrayed him, had tipped off Marguerite about his real intentions.

"Well, we'll see about that," Pete said. "We'll talk about this some more at an early opportunity. Right now I have to drive out to a conference." He wheeled round and strode away.

"Thank you so much, Velva Linda," Marguerite said when Pete was out of earshot. "I really needed your help."

"Any time," Velva Linda said with a big smile, looking deep into Marguerite's welcoming eyes. She wished she could say "*Every* time, for the rest of our lives"—but it would mean she wished she could marry Marguerite, which was impossible.

Velva Linda, unlike Pete and Marguerite, had to walk uphill a couple of blocks and down the street to get back to work from the cathedral. She walked slowly up the steep hill, taking her time, for today she was not actually going back to work; she was going to take the afternoon off for her 29th birthday.

As she reached the corner of Semakoboomish and Ragnarsson Streets, two blocks up, she heard car horns honking and then, briefly, a police siren. She turned to look back down the hill. It looked like a car had been going uphill, the wrong way, on Semakoboomish Street which was one way downhill. She couldn't see the car because a police car, with

lights flashing, was in the way. She heard some shouting, but she couldn't make out the words. Somebody must have been awfully inattentive, she thought, to go the wrong way on a busy street like Semakoboomish—but she had no idea who it was, and it didn't seem to concern her.

She retrieved her little car from the parking garage near the offices of Grando, Nix & Fumus, and drove carefully and correctly along Ragnarsson Street to Capitoline Avenue, where she made a right turn and ascended the steep slope toward the Pacificum State Capitol. She was going to drive to her parents' home, but not directly. First she needed to stop at her apartment and change clothes.

She turned off Capitoline onto Beamish Street, parked the car in her assigned spot, and went up to her little apartment to undergo her transformation, as she always did at least four times a year before visiting her parents: on Christmas, Ash Wednesday, Easter, and her birthday. On three of those days, her parents actually set foot in church, which they didn't do on many other occasions. Today, on Velva Linda's birthday, they presumably hadn't been to church, and she herself would be the center of attention—but not under the name, nor the appearance, of Velva Linda.

Her hair was held back by a headband. She took it off. Her breasts were concealed, more or less, by a prim white blouse and a lacy white bra. She took them off too. In their place, she pulled on a thick, sturdy, strapless elastic body-shaper to squash her breasts into some semblance of flatness. Then she put on a white T-shirt and a men's plaid shirt, with the shirt over her hair in back so it wouldn't look any more like a girl's hair than necessary. Her skirt, her panties, and her ladies' shoes were next to come off. They were replaced by men's boxer shorts, men's jeans, and men's socks and running shoes. Soon Velva Linda, but for her pretty face and her partly hidden hair, looked quite like a short, slightly plump young man—a young man named Vicente.

This, indeed, was to be her identity for the afternoon—or rather *his* identity. When visiting her parents, Velva Linda always reverted to being Vicente. Vicente’s parents didn’t approve of effeminacy, and he had always tried to keep his girlish sexiness strictly secret as long as he lived at home, even while he was secretly blossoming into Velva Linda. True, he wasn’t going to cut his hair short now, even at home—but in every other respect he would be as fully a male as he was capable of being.

Vicente exited his apartment, returned to his car, pulled out onto Beamish, and turned east onto Rangoon Avenue, heading up around the curve to Capitol Circle. When he was facing straight toward the State Capitol, he turned left to go around the circle, then left again to go straight downhill on East Capitoline Avenue. Now he was heading toward home—but first he must go straight down into the heart of the most notorious slum in Pacific Heights, known simply as “The District.”

Often putting on the brakes, Vicente descended along broad East Capitoline Avenue past fairly decent-looking homes, shops, and apartment buildings on the rear end of the Capitoline Hill. Then he passed ever cheaper and trashier-looking structures and vacant lots as the hill gave way to the deep depression of the District, surrounded by hills but actually below sea level, like Death Valley or the Dead Sea. Vicente was heading straight toward the heart of darkness, the place where he had decided he must escape from the District at all costs, and must emerge as Velva Linda after escaping: Crispus Attucks High School. Too vividly he remembered the constant need for extreme caution, and for dependence upon the police, in threading his way largely unharmed through the maze of dope fiends, sex fiends, gang fiends, race fiends, and fiends of every description in the gigantic, unruly prison-school.

Vicente breathed a deep sigh of relief when he was well past the school, and past the worst part of the District. Now he was getting close to home. He turned

off East Capitoline and drove up the familiar little hill to the even more familiar little house on Squalm Street, still in the District, but in a more nearly decent area than the dung pit around the high school.

“Vicente! Welcome home! Happy birthday!” his mom said when he entered the house. “Everybody’s here, except your dad of course.” Vicente’s dad was a long-distance truck driver; he made probably better money than most inhabitants of the District, but his time with the family was in short supply. “I don’t see the boys right now, but here’s Aurelia and the little ones.”

“Hi, Vicente!” said his older sister Aurelia, who was 33 and married with two small children, Daniel (age 4, busily playing with toys on the floor) and Susana (age 1, resting in her mother’s arms). Vicente and Aurelia gave each other kisses on the cheek. Aurelia had discreetly introduced Vicente to the delight of girlish pretensions at an early age, but Vicente alone, in strictest secrecy, had discovered the extreme excitement of *sexy* girlish pretensions at 12.

“And how are you doing, Vicente?” Mom asked. “Have you found a girl yet?” Mom always asked Vicente that when he came home. She was obviously afraid Vicente might be a homosexual, but confident that he would prove he wasn’t one if only he got a girlfriend.

“Actually, Mom, I have,” Vicente said—surprising himself almost as much as he surprised and delighted his mom. “Her name is Marguerite, and we—we like each other a lot.”

“Margarita! A beautiful name!” Mom cried, ignoring the difference between Spanish and French. “Oh, I’m so happy for you! So now she’s your girlfriend?”

“Well, not yet,” Vicente said, “but—um—I hope she will be.” Fear that it was impossible still gripped him hard and painfully, but at least he found himself beginning to fight against the fear.

“Oh, so do I!” said Mom. Of course she didn’t know Marguerite, but she needed only to know that Marguerite was female, and that Vicente hoped she would become his girlfriend, to give her good hope that Vicente wasn’t a homosexual after all.

“You should have invited her to the party,” Mom said.

“Uh—well, maybe next year,” Vicente said. “I mean, like I said, she’s not my girlfriend—at least not yet.” *There was no way I could have invited her,* Vicente thought. It wasn’t because Marguerite’s family lived in decent, clean, semi-suburban Beaconsfield and Vicente’s family lived in the District; he was pretty sure that wouldn’t make any difference to Marguerite. No, it was entirely because Vicente didn’t want Marguerite to know the whole truth about her friend Velva Linda.

“Well, I’m looking forward to meeting her,” Mom said pointedly. “And now let’s eat.”

Birthday parties at the Buenazno house were feasts, with the cake and ice cream serving only as dessert. Mom brought forth nachos loaded with cheese and salsa, quesadillas, enchiladas, fajitas, and more. “Arturo! Eduardo!” she called out loudly to Vicente’s brothers Arturo, age 17, and Eduardo, 11. “Let’s eat!”

Eduardo promptly emerged from his room. Arturo did not. The rest of the family didn’t wait for him before saying grace: “Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts, which we are about to receive from Thy bounty through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Vicente remembered well that, although the members of his family were not very good Catholics in terms of education, regular Mass attendance, eschewing birth control, and such things, their lives were filled with trappings of Catholic culture, including grace before meals. There was a big picture on the dining-room wall showing Jesus revealing His Sacred

Heart, too, though it was usually ignored. Now Jesus and His Heart were staring Vicente straight in the face, if only he cared to look. He did care. The picture made him think of Marguerite—whose heart, Vicente imagined, was more than a bit like the Heart of Jesus.

Vicente took good-sized helpings of many things as the meal proceeded, and answered Mom's questions about Marguerite as best he could, but most of the meal was spent in conversation between Mom and Aurelia. Vicente had time to think, as he must, about how he had come to this strange, difficult point in his life—and how he could move beyond it, if he could.

He knew almost perfectly well why he had become Velva Linda—first secretly, at 12, and then openly, after he escaped from Crispus Attucks High. He was little and lonely, he had no hope of being loved by a girl, and it was so incredibly exciting to be his *own* girl, needing no other—wearing Aurelia's pretty hand-me-downs, and then taking them off, pretending to be a sexy girl for an imaginary boy. His girlish erotic feelings were so soothing to his heart, numbing the pain of loneliness, giving him beauty and goodness while the world outside was ugly and vile. He just had to indulge in them almost every night—but always in strictest secrecy, for he feared and loathed the sex fiends who would surely take vicious advantage of him if they knew he was effeminate.

By the time he graduated from high school, Vicente had fully become Velva Linda in his heart, or *her* heart. Nothing remained to be done but to bring Velva Linda from the darkness out into the light. Almost as soon as she left home and moved into a dorm at the U, she began to wear women's clothes, to train her voice, to take hormones to enlarge her breasts, and she legally changed her name to Velva Linda. Before too long she was thrilled to recognize that she was very attractive to men, including some very nice men, totally unlike the sex fiends of Crispus Attucks High. She went on dates with men, and she did do

some awfully sexy things with the ones she liked the most.

Her aim was to go to law school and become a prosecutor—to put dope fiends, sex fiends, gang fiends, race fiends, and other fiends in prison and keep them there, for as long as possible. She did go to law school, electing to attend St. Ives Law School in Appledale, a comparatively small school with a friendlier, less cutthroat atmosphere than many law schools reputedly had, and with a Catholic history. The Catholic history was, indeed, largely *history*. Many of the Catholic students and professors were no better Catholics than Velva Linda and her family, and there were many non-Catholic students too—including Pete, who was a second-year student when Velva Linda was a first-year. St. Ives was where Velva Linda first met Pete, and where she first had sex with him (not in the school itself, of course, but in Pete's apartment nearby.)

Pete was *so manly*, and he made Velva Linda feel like the most desirable woman in the universe when she was with him! She was totally crazy about him, and wanted to marry him, by the time he graduated from law school—even though she knew he wasn't quite as crazy about *her* as she was about *him*. Pete's big aim was to make sexual conquests (especially if he could conquer Catholic virgins), and Velva Linda feared she might be only one of many in his eyes.

Velva Linda still didn't quite know why Pete had ultimately selected her, out of all his conquests, as his falsely so-called "one and only"—but she sure hadn't complained about it at the time. Not too long after she graduated, and started working for a high-powered law firm to pay off her law-school debts before becoming a prosecutor, Velva Linda was fairly confident that she was Pete's "number one" at least, if not really his "one and only." They had sex pretty regularly, except when Velva Linda gave it up for Lent—and, when she did, it only seemed to make Pete more eager to come back to her afterward.

Now everything was different—or was it? Would Velva Linda ever return to Pete? If not, would she complete her seduction of Roger and become his lady love? Or would she, incredibly, become more than just dear friends with Marguerite?

Velva Linda had no idea. She glanced up again at the picture of Jesus and His Heart. Words flitted through her mind, faintly remembered from one of her bursts of comparative piety in some past Lent: “Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make our hearts like unto Thine.” Now she could not even bring herself to murmur the words—and yet, in silence, she could feel her heart filling to overflowing with yearning to become like Marguerite’s heart, which she was pretty sure was far more like the Heart of Jesus than her own heart was.

By the time the cake and ice cream were served, Velva Linda’s reverie had ended and she, or he, was Vicente again. The cake was Vicente’s favorite, carrot cake with lemon icing, but there were not 29 candles on it, only one in the shape of a 2 and one of a 9. All present sang “Happy birthday, dear Vicente,” and Vicente made a wish out loud before easily blowing out the candles. Perhaps it was absurd, but Vicente knew it would make his mother very happy, and he really would wish it if only it were possible: “I wish I’ll marry Marguerite.”

“Oh, Vicente, I’m so happy for you!” his mom exclaimed—almost as if he had announced he was already engaged to Marguerite, although he knew it was really only because Mom thought this proved he wasn’t a homosexual.

With all he had eaten, while paying more attention to his thoughts and memories than to the food, Vicente was pretty full by the time he finished the cake and ice cream; he figured he might need to confess a sin of gluttony when he next went to confession. He wondered what others he might need to confess. He figured there probably would be some, although he really was trying not to commit them.

Arturo still had not appeared. Vicente wondered why not. He hoped Arturo wasn't sick. "Where's Arturo?" he asked. "He's not sick, is he?"

Mom frowned. "Not what doctors call sick," she said. "But he spends a lot of time in his room. He doesn't like to be disturbed."

"Well, at least I want to see him before I take off," Vicente said.

"Vicente, I really don't think that's a good idea! You'll be sorry!" Mom cried out—but Vicente was already heading toward Arturo's room, and did not turn back.

The door was shut, but not locked, because the kids' bedroom doors didn't have locks on them, as Vicente remembered all too well. He knocked.

"What the fuck do you want now?" was Arturo's response.

"Hey, Arturo," Vicente said, opening the door. "It's me, Vicente. Can I come in?"

"Oh, it's you," Arturo said, meaning *not Mom*. "Uh, sure, come on in."

Vicente came in. Arturo was sitting at his computer, a pretty old and clunky one, but evidently useful enough for his purposes. He was in his underwear, and his room smelled like semen. He was pressed tight against his desk in front of the computer, obviously trying to hide an erection under the desk.

"Hey, take a look at this," Arturo said. When Vicente looked at the screen, he saw why Arturo would have an erection. The computer was displaying a video of a man fucking a woman from behind, while reaching up under her to grip her breasts. The intercourse was real, not simulated; you could actually see the man's penis going in and out in the

woman's vagina. Vicente stared, but then he looked away.

"I don't want to see that," he said. He was struck, and sickened, by the thought that this was like what Pete had wished to do to Marguerite, if he had been able to conquer her—and that Pete would have had no more love for Marguerite than the fuckheads in this porn video had for each other. He had to try to protect Marguerite from Pete, he thought, no matter what—even if everything he had desperately sought to keep secret must come out.

"What the fuck do you mean, you don't want to see it?" Arturo expostulated. "Are you gay? I bet you're gay! You want to see men getting their butts fucked—and you want to get your butt fucked yourself!"

"I do not!" said Vicente, who had always regarded butt-fucking as incredibly nasty. "I don't want to see that crap because it's no better than men fucking butts! And I don't want to see you wasting your life on it! You didn't even come out to celebrate my birthday because you were watching that shit and jacking off! Why don't you stop being such a—a disgusting loser?"

"Get the fuck out!" Arturo shouted. "*Now!* And don't come back. If I had a gun, I'd kill you. Nobody tells me what the fuck to do. *Nobody!*"

He gave Vicente the finger with both hands. Vicente almost felt like responding in kind, but he didn't. He just stared at Arturo, as if he were seeing a bottomless pit far deeper than Death Valley or the District. Then he turned away and shut the door.

"Vicente, I told you," Mom said softly when Vicente re-emerged. "You shouldn't have done that. You should have left him alone."

Vicente swallowed hard. He feared Mom might be right, and yet he wasn't sure she was. "I don't know,

Mom,” he said. “You don’t want him to stay that way for life, and never get free from that—that addiction.”

“No, I don’t,” Mom said. “But I don’t know what to do.” She was silent a for a few moments. “Pray for Arturo,” she said at last. “And pray for me. Ask your girl Margarita to pray for us too.”

“I will, Mom,” Vicente promised, and he meant it. The easy part would be asking Marguerite. The hard part would be doing it himself, after so many years of little or no prayer. Still, he would do it, for Mom and for Arturo—and for Marguerite.

Vicente said good-bye to Mom, Aurelia and her kids, and Eduardo. He started up the little car, drove down Squalm Street to East Capitoline, and began the journey back out of the District, back up to the Capitoline Hill, and to being Velva Linda. As far as possible, consistent with watching out for other drivers and pedestrians on East Capitoline, he kept his eyes on the hill and the Capitol in the distance. The hill was far smaller than Mount Everest, but still it made him think of Marguerite. As time went on, there were fewer and fewer things that *didn’t* make him think of Marguerite.

He arrived at Capitol Circle, drove around to Rangoon, and began the descent down the seaward side of the hill above downtown. Before too long he had re-entered his apartment. Now he would become Velva Linda again—or would he?

Vicente looked at himself in the mirror and imagined himself reverting to being fully male, even having at least some of his beautiful hair cut off. “Marguerite, I’m really a man,” he imagined himself saying, “a man named Vicente. I love you. Will you marry me?”

It was absurd. He wouldn't dare. Marguerite would surely be repelled, dismayed, disgusted, at the revelation that her friend Velva Linda was really a male in disguise. It could not, would not, must not ever happen. Still, Vicente tarried long before he finally removed his male attire, took off his breast-squasher, put on his—or rather *her* panties and bra, and completed the transformation from Vicente to Velva Linda.

Chapter 6

“Velva Linda,” Roger said on the phone, only a couple of hours after Vicente had again become Velva Linda. “This is Roger. I was just thinking, uh—how much I love you, and how much I'd like to see you again soon.”

“Oh!” Velva Linda said. “Why, thank you, Roger! I—uh—I'd like to see you again soon, too!” She felt a twinge of shame at the thought that she might be going to do something awfully sexy with Roger, so soon after telling Mom about Marguerite and wishing out loud that she might marry Marguerite. Still, the thought of completing her seduction of Roger was so unbearably exciting that she could not back down now.

“Like how soon?” Roger demanded to know. “Maybe this evening?”

“Oh! Well! Uh—yes, tonight would be fine! Where would you like to go?”

“Your place or mine.”

“Oh, Roger! Are you sure?” Velva Linda was thrilled, and yet dismayed at how eager for sex Roger now seemed to be. It seemed impossible that his views on that fascinating subject could have been so rapidly and thoroughly revised from the devout Catholic views he had held so recently—and yet what else could be the explanation of *this*?

“Yes, I’m sure,” Roger said. “I’ve been doing a lot of thinking, and I’ve—uh—changed my mind about some things.”

Velva Linda took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Well, then,” she said, “would you like to come to my apartment in just a little while?”

“Yes,” Roger said. “A *really* little while. I just got off work. I’ll be there soon.”

Velva Linda thought of wearing a sexy negligee, but she decided it would be a bit *too* forward. She settled on a cream-colored blouse through which her lacy red décolleté bra could be discerned, a moderately short red skirt, and bare feet suitable to her white-carpeted floor.

As promised, Roger soon arrived. “Hi, Roger!” Velva Linda said with a big smile. “Come on in! Would you like some wine?”

“I’ll have a sip,” Roger said. His eyes were fixed on Velva Linda as he entered the apartment.

Velva Linda poured two glasses of sweet sherry. “Would you like to sit with me on the love seat?” she asked coquettishly. Roger took a glass from her and sat down.

“Um, you said you’d been thinking about some things,” she said. “Like what? Like maybe some of the things we’ve been doing?”

“That’s right,” Roger said. “I’ve been thinking they weren’t sins after all.”

“Oh! Well! Uh—that’s a really big change for you, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, a *really* big change.”

“Well—how did it come about? What were you thinking?”

“Well, I was thinking about how you’re the only woman who’s ever really loved me, and how God *made* me to love and be loved, and gave me needs and desires that just—absolutely have to be satisfied. I’ve had them since I was 11 years old, way too young to get married. I couldn’t believe any longer that God, who *gave* me those needs and desires, didn’t want me to satisfy them. Even when I—uh—I found out your secret, I still wanted to—you know—“

“To make love with me?” Velva Linda was quickly getting carried away by her own needs and desires, almost forgetting all about Marguerite. She leaned toward Roger, anticipating a kiss.

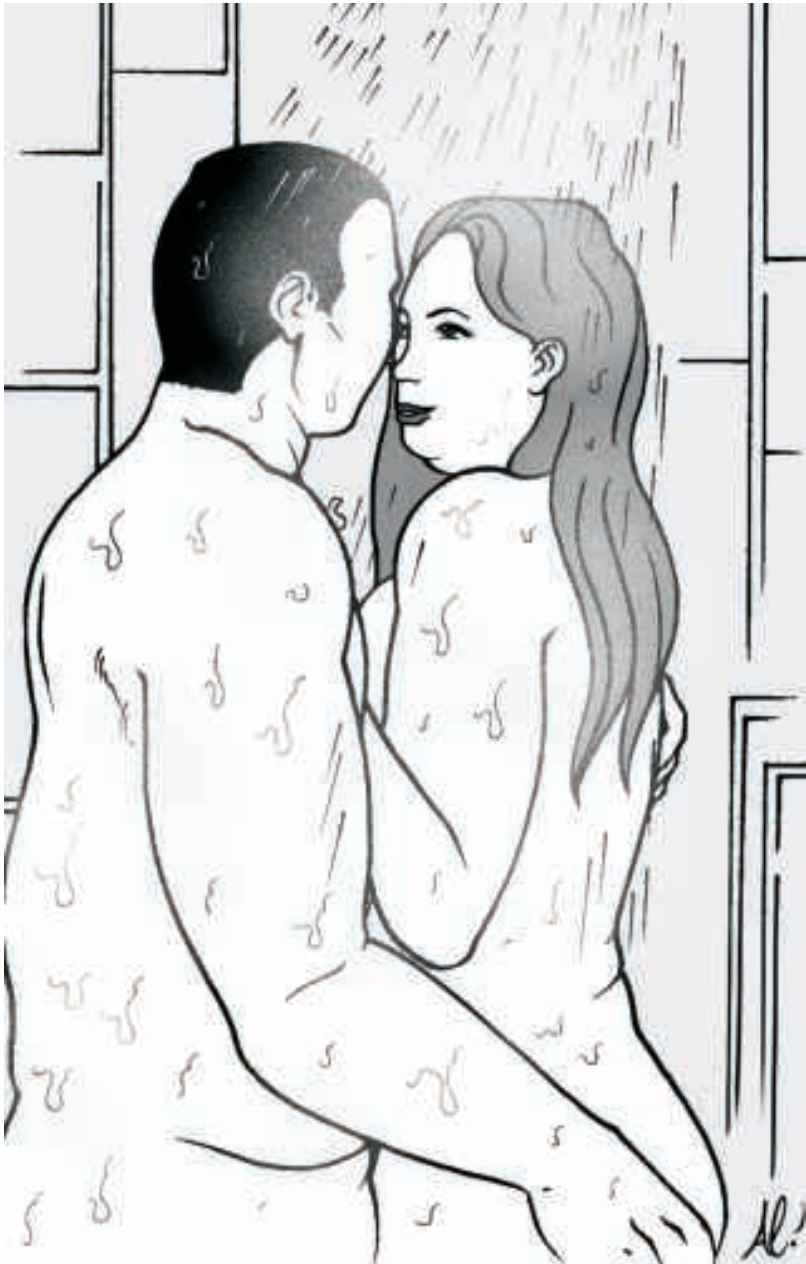
“Yes,” Roger said, embracing her. Their lips and tongues met and lingered long together. Roger’s hand was on Velva Linda’s breast almost at once. Her secret was hard in her panties before the long kiss ended. Roger’s hand slipped under her short skirt, touched her panties, caressed her secret.

“Oh, Roger, yes! *Yes!* I want to!” Velva Linda moaned, pressing his hand against her secret inside her panties. “Take me in the shower! I’m all yours!”

They stood up and entered the bathroom, still fully clothed, but not for long. They kissed on the mouth again. Roger’s hands were on Velva Linda’s big, womanly butt, pulling down her skirt and panties at once. Her secret was sticking out, but she pressed it down into hiding between her thighs, still with her blouse and bra on.

“Undo my bra,” she begged, opening her blouse. “Kiss my breasts.” This time her bra was a back-hook one. Roger awkwardly struggled to unhook it, but at last succeeded. Embracing her tightly, he kissed her breasts, licking and sucking her nipples with manly ardor.

Velva Linda stepped into the shower, turned on the warm water, and lathered herself up between her thighs while Roger rapidly stripped. “Now come into



me—please!” Velva Linda begged, guiding his hard six-inch penis to her delta, and then into the tight, hot, soapy entryway between her hidden secret and her thigh.

When he had entered her, Roger could not hold himself back. He started thrusting mightily at once. Velva Linda was clutching him hard with her hands and her thighs, bucking her hips wildly, and moaning at the approach of orgasm. Roger’s orgasm gripped him at the same time as Velva Linda’s gripped her. “Velva Linda, I love you!” he moaned as he began to ejaculate. “I love you! I’ll always love you! Will you marry me?”

Velva Linda gasped—but not because she was at the hottest point of her climax, although she was. The thought of Arturo’s porn video was attacking her, and with it the thought that she and Roger were doing something just as idiotic as the fuckheads in the video had done.

“Will you marry me?” Roger begged again.

She would not. She knew she would not. She only did not know how she would tell Roger she would not.

“Uh—Roger, let’s talk about it after we finish our shower and get dressed,” she said, pleading for time.

Roger was drained, but still full of ineffable bliss. He had made love, fully made love, with the woman of his dreams, and he would not confess it as a sin. Soon they would marry, and their joy would endure for life. He was dressed already, and sitting again on the love seat. He had only to wait for Velva Linda to emerge from her bedroom dressed, and their new life would begin.

She emerged, dressed differently than before. Now she wore a high-necked, knee-length dress that re-

mindful of Marguerite, who had rejected him. Still, Velva Linda herself would not reject him. She could not, for they were far too deeply in love.

She sat with him on the love seat, close to him but not touching him. Roger waited in silence. At last he prompted her: "Well, then, what about it? Velva Linda, will you marry me?"

She clasped her hands together and looked away. "Roger, I can't," she said.

Roger started to gasp, but clenched his teeth and stopped himself. This could not be happening. There must be some mistake. Velva Linda must have some fear, some misunderstanding, some secret yet undisclosed, that could be overcome, and then all would be well.

"Velva Linda, what's wrong?" he asked, touching her tenderly on the shoulder. "We're in love. Whatever it is, we can work it out, if we'll just talk about it."

"No, Roger," Velva Linda said—stabbing Roger deep in the heart. "This is it. I've realized I'm not in love with you after all. I was seducing you. I was acting like a—a porn actress with you. I'm ashamed of myself. I'm going to go to confession tomorrow morning."

God damn it! Roger's heart cried out in silence, and he meant it. His eyes bulged in horror. He had sacrificed everything for Velva Linda—and now she was betraying him, abandoning him, throwing him in the trash! God *must* damn this evil, or there was nothing damnable in the universe!

"You lied to me," Roger said. "You led me to believe you were in love with me, and you wanted to marry me. And I fell for it! I can't believe this!" Roger stared at Velva Linda in mounting outrage.

He had to find a way to strike back, to gain revenge for this vicious crime against truth, and love, and

simple human decency. He could think of only one way permitted by law: to deprive Velva Linda of a friend, as she had deprived him of a lover, namely herself. “Did Marguerite know what kind of person you were when she introduced me to you?” he demanded to know. “Did she know you were a—a gay male seducer in women’s clothing?”

“No!” Velva Linda cried. Roger saw fear in her eyes, fear of disclosure. He struck hard, directly at Velva Linda’s heart. “Well, she’ll know now,” he said. “I’m going to let her know exactly what kind of filthy, lying, loathsome scum you are!”

“Roger, no!” Velva Linda begged. “Please don’t!” Roger could hear the terror in her voice and see it in her eyes. He knew he had her by the throat, and he rejoiced to know. She must value Marguerite’s friendship greatly, he thought. Well, then, so much the better if she did!

“I’ve got to,” he said with a smile. “This is the only way that *justice* can be done!”

Velva Linda got little sleep that night. She had sunk into a pit as foul as Arturo’s porn pit, and worse—for the fuckheads in the porn video did not pretend to be in love. She could hardly even imagine how she could confess what she had done—and yet she *must* confess, for she was sure she had done a deadly sin. She set her alarm to go off good and early, to wake her up for early-morning confession even if she was sound asleep. Then she lay face up on her bed and closed her eyes, but did not sleep, while her conscience raked her over the coals of hell.

The alarm went off, loudly, insistently, demanding a response. Velva Linda must have fallen asleep at last, though only very late. She could hardly move, and yet she forced herself to lurch out of bed. Groggy and dizzy, she moved slowly and unsurely, but at

least she kept moving, no matter what. Making and eating breakfast, drinking some extra-strong tea to help her wake up, getting her clothes on and locking her apartment, driving her car carefully down the steep hill to the parking garage on Ragnarsson Street and walking down to the cathedral, she was actually praying, over and over again: "God, help me! Please help me!" She did not pray to God to save her friendship with Marguerite, for that would surely be lost when Roger made his damning revelations. She only prayed that God Himself, in spite of everything, would show Himself a friend to her and forgive her.

She entered the huge, nearly empty cathedral. Only a few people ahead of her were waiting in line for confession to begin. She knelt and finished being raked over by her conscience; then she got in line.

The green light went on when the priest entered the confessional, and then the red one when the first person in line went in. "God, please help me make a *good* confession," Velva Linda silently begged with considerably more than her usual sincerity. "Please forgive me—and help me stop being so disgusting to You!"

Before too long it was her turn. The green light went on again. She entered and knelt down, behind the screen, not wanting anyone but God Himself to see her.

"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned," she said. "It's been—ugh!—only about five days since my last confession, but—since that time I seduced a man, I had sex with him, I misled him to think I might marry him, and I led him to abandon the Catholic faith. I also wish to include in this confession all the sins of my whole life, especially—uh—any sins of untruthfulness and misleading people."

"Well, that's a lot to accomplish in only five days," the priest said in a dry, matter-of-fact, but very faintly jovial-sounding tone. "How did you lead him to abandon the Catholic faith in that little time?"

“Well, uh—I’d been doing some previous sins with him, which I’ve already confessed before, and he decided things like having sex with me were no sins after all, and he wasn’t going to confess them. And instead of telling him they *were* sins and he *should* confess them, I just went right ahead and had sex with him. I knew he thought he was in love with me and he wanted to marry me, but I did it anyway. Then he asked me to marry him, uh, right while we were committing the sin, and I had to tell him I wasn’t going to marry him and I wasn’t going to sin with him any more—and he got really, really angry.”

“Well, it sounds as if the abandonment of the Catholic faith may have been much more of his doing than yours,” said the priest. “You didn’t *tell* him his sins were no sins and he shouldn’t confess them, did you?”

“Oh, no!”

“And you’re really not going to do those sins with him any more, are you?”

“No, I’m not.” For once, Velva Linda really meant it, with no wiggly evasions about not being sure her resolution was going to last very long.

“All right. For your penance, please offer up a decade of the rosary for the conversion of sinners, including the man you were talking about. Now make a good act of contrition.”

“O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended You, and I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, but most of all because they offend You, my God, who are all good and worthy of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Your grace, to sin no more, and to avoid the near occasions of sin.” Yes, this time she really meant it, and her heart rose up in hope, as if she might even be worthy to look Marguerite in the face someday.

The priest said the words of absolution and told Velva Linda, “Your sins are forgiven; go in peace.”

She thanked him and emerged from the confessional. She didn't have a rosary, so she counted the 10 Hail Marys on her fingers while thinking about the Resurrection—including, she hoped, her own real resurrection from sin and idiocy, and even Roger's too. Then she left the cathedral and began to walk up the steep hill toward the office, ready to meet Marguerite again at midday Mass—and even to meet Roger too, if he really carried out his threat.

Roger eagerly awaited his opportunity. He was in the cathedral, but now he was free from the Church. He had expected to see Marguerite here, but he was extra glad to see that Velva Linda was with her. This would be perfect.

The Mass ended. The two ladies, the real one and the fake one, stayed and prayed. Roger could hardly wait for them to get up and leave.

At last they did. Roger intercepted them just inside the door. "Well, hello, Marguerite," he said. "Hello, Velva Linda. I wonder if I might have a word with you two ladies." He placed a heavy, sarcastic emphasis on the word "ladies."

"Let's go outside, so we don't disturb people praying," said Marguerite. They went outside.

"Marguerite, I was just wondering how much you really know about your friend Velva Linda," Roger said with a big smile. "Did you happen to know that Velva Linda is really a *male in female's clothing*?"

Roger glanced at Velva Linda with satisfaction. With her golden-brown skin, she was incapable of actually turning pale, but she was coming as close to it as she could. Fear and anguish radiated out from her dark eyes to her whole face.

He looked back to Marguerite. She was frowning and staring as if in disbelief, but at Roger, not at Velva Linda. “Uh—why, no, Roger, I *didn't* know that,” she said. “Would you mind telling me why you’re saying this?”

“Because it’s the truth!” Roger cried. “And you know what else is the truth? Velva Linda seduced me into having gay sex! Velva Linda lied and said she was in love with me, and let me to believe she wanted to marry me! Velva Linda got me to decide to leave the Church for her—and then she promptly *threw me in the trash!* Isn’t that the greatest little Catholic friend you could imagine?”

Marguerite’s mouth was wide open in obvious astonishment. “Well, *you’re* not, anyway,” she rebuked him.

Now it was Roger’s jaw that dropped. He was shocked. It wasn’t at all like Marguerite to say something like that—*or was it?* Did she have some secret store of anger and hostility, carefully concealed, from which she would have brought forth stinging rebukes and reprimands *ad nauseam* if Roger had married her? He was terrifically glad, now, that he hadn’t married her.

“What about *her?*” Roger almost shouted. “What about Velva Linda? Are you going to put up with this sin, this female impersonation, this gay seduction, this total betrayal of the Catholic Faith?”

“I’ll discuss those things with Velva Linda, not you,” Marguerite said. “Velva Linda is my friend, and she’s going to stay my friend, no matter what you say about her.” She hesitated, as if unsure whether she should say more, but then went on. “I was afraid this was going to happen,” she said. “I could see that you were sex-crazed, and it might only take one little spark to make you explode and leave the Church. Now it’s happened, and you’ve become filled with hatred. You’re in no position to complain about betrayal of the Catholic faith.”

Roger's jaw dropped again, even farther this time. He stared at Marguerite in outrage. This was not the gentle, tender-hearted young woman he had wished to marry, not so long ago. She was revealing a hard core of antagonism that Roger could not, would not, must not put up with.

"I can't believe this," Roger proclaimed. "You thought *I* wasn't good enough for you, but this *fake female*, this *gay seducer*, this *bad Catholic to end all bad Catholics*, is good enough for you! Well, you can have her! I'm through with both of you!"

Roger turned around and strode away. Marguerite and Velva Linda stood in silence, watching him go. At last Marguerite softly said, "We'll both need to get back to work soon, but would you like to talk about this over dinner at The Decencies?"

"Uh—well, sure!" Velva Linda agreed.

"Good. I'll see you there at about 6:00. You'll be off work by then, won't you?"

"I'll think so." Velva Linda had to work pretty long hours at Grando, Nix & Fumus, but at least she would have time for dinner.

"I'm glad. See you then."

Marguerite smiled and walked back toward the Big Black Block. Velva Linda smiled in return, though more faintly, before turning away to walk back up the hill. Marguerite was still her friend, and everything seemed to be all right—so far. She only feared everything would *not* still be all right when Marguerite found out that everything Roger had said was true—as she must, not many hours from now.

Velva Linda got off work a bit earlier than she expected, and walked down to The Decencies on Arthur Boulevard to wait for Marguerite. She figured Mar-

guerite was probably in the cathedral, praying. She almost thought of joining her, but didn't. Instead she entered the restaurant, sat down near the entrance, and waited.

The restaurant was calm and fairly quiet inside, despite the traffic outside and the many people eating dinner. Classical music with trumpets, French horns, and woodwinds was playing on the sound system. The walls were covered with pictures that seemed like windows into other worlds, worlds of beauty and peace, and of course of the utmost decency.

Marguerite entered. "Oh, hi!" She said. "I haven't kept you waiting long, have I?"

"Not at all," said Velva Linda. "I was just enjoying the peace and quiet."

"This place is great for that," said Marguerite. "And for talking about, uh, important things, too."

Marguerite requested a table near the back of the restaurant, where it was a bit less crowded. They sat down next to each other, at one of the many round tables with checkered tablecloths, and ordered from the menu. Then, while they waited for their dinner to arrive, Marguerite spoke first.

"Velva Linda, I really need to thank you," she said. "I had my suspicions about Roger, but they were so terrible I really thought I needed to keep them to myself. I don't think I would have found out for sure what was lurking beneath his exterior, ready to break out, if it hadn't been for you."

"Oh!" Velva Linda said. "Well, uh—you're welcome." She could hardly look up into Marguerite's soft, kind brown eyes. She didn't want Marguerite to know how this alarming confirmation of her suspicions about Roger had come about, for it would mean admitting that everything Roger had said was true—and yet she must admit it, if Marguerite wanted to know, for she couldn't lie to Marguerite.

“Um—you don’t need to tell me this if you don’t want to,” Marguerite said, “but—were any of those things Roger was saying about you *true*?”

Now Velva Linda couldn’t look at Marguerite at all. She swallowed hard. Tears were filling her eyes. She *did* need to tell Marguerite. The truth, the disastrous truth, must come out right now.

“Yes,” she said, and sobbed. “They were *all* true. I didn’t—I didn’t want you to know—because I was afraid you’d never want to see me again!”

Velva Linda was crying and shaking so hard, she could barely feel Marguerite’s hand gently touching her shoulder. At last, though, she felt it, and looked up, and tried to dry her eyes.

“That won’t happen,” Marguerite assured her. “I’ll always want to see you again—as long as you want to see *me* again.”

Velva Linda’s eyes grew painfully wide in astonishment. She cried again, but now her tears were tears of barely believing joy. “I’ll always—*always* want to see *you* again!” she stammered, tasting the bitter salt of her tears.

They were silent for what seemed a very long time. The waitress brought their dinner before they spoke again. They said grace, of course, and began to eat. At last Marguerite said, “So, uh, you did this—this *thing* with Roger, and he decided he was going to leave the Church for you, and then you told him you weren’t going to go on with it after all? Is that the basic idea?”

“Uh—yes,” Velva Linda admitted, astounded that Marguerite could speak of it so matter-of-factly.

“And you’re really *not* going to go on with it, are you?”

“Oh, *no! Ugh!* I—when it was happening, I suddenly thought of my brother Arturo. Oh, please pray

for Arturo—my mom asked me to ask you—and pray for my mom too! See, I went to my parent’s house to celebrate my birthday, and Arturo didn’t come out of his room, and I wondered why and I went in—and he was in his underwear, watching porn on his computer. I was totally disgusted—and then when I was with Roger I, I suddenly thought what I was doing with *him* was just as disgusting as what the—the actor and actress were doing in the porn video! And it *was!* And I—I never wanted to admit this to you, and I wouldn’t have, if Roger hadn’t made that terrible scene today and told everything!” Velva Linda was crying again. Incredibly, Marguerite actually put her arm around her to comfort her.

“Well, it sounds like you’re very sorry about what you did with Roger,” Marguerite said, almost too softly to be heard.

“Yes. I really am. I went to confession this morning.”

“So Roger was accusing you of sins that were already forgiven.”

“Yes, I guess that’s right.”

“Well, all right, then. We won’t need to talk about them any more.”

Velva Linda looked up and quickly dried her eyes, so she could see Marguerite clearly. Marguerite was smiling at her. “There’s more joy in heaven,” she quoted, “over one sinner who repents, than over 99 righteous people who never need to repent.”

Velva Linda blinked. “More joy over *me* than—uh—over *you?*”

Marguerite laughed. “No, I’m not one of the 99 either,” she said. “But, you know, St. Therese wondered about that. She was pretty sure she’d never actually committed any mortal sins, but she thought, ‘Just think what horrible sins I *would* have commit-

ted, if God hadn't kept me from it!' So there could be joy in heaven over her, too."

Velva Linda sat in silence, breathing deeply, trying to imagine what joy in heaven would be like. It would be unimaginably great, she thought, if only Marguerite were there too.

"So I guess," Marguerite interrupted her thoughts, "the other thing Roger was saying was true, too? I mean, about you, uh, not really being a woman?"

"Yes." It was revealed at last, and there was no disaster after all—at least, none that Velva Linda could detect.

"Well, that's pretty hard to believe, but I guess I'll have to take your word for it. I mean, I can't imagine why you would want to *lie* about that."

"I wouldn't," Velva Linda said. "Um—especially not to *you*. I couldn't lie to you."

Marguerite smiled, broadly and brilliantly. "I think we're going to be really great friends, then," she said.

Velva Linda's heart leaped high. "You mean, uh, it doesn't bother you that I'm—different than I look?"

"That *might* never be any of my concern," Marguerite said, looking pensive. "I just thought that, since Roger mentioned it, you might want to tell me if it was true or not. We won't need to talk about it any more, unless—"

Marguerite stopped. Velva Linda wondered why. "Unless what?" she asked.

"Well, uh, unless there was ever any good reason to talk about it," Marguerite said vaguely, looking away. Velva Linda was startled to see that Marguerite was blushing.

There's a good reason right now! I love you! I want to know if I might ever marry you! Of course Velva Linda

did *not* say the words, but her heart was thundering so loud at the thoughts that she felt sure Marguerite must be able to hear it.

“Um, maybe there *is* a good reason,” Velva Linda said instead. “I mean, I want you to know all about me, if you really want to know. I’ve already told you the worst, or at least some of the worst.”

“I don’t need to hear about the rest of the worst,” Marguerite said. “If you’ve confessed your sins and resolved you’re not going to commit them any more, with the help of God’s grace, that’s all that matters about *that*.” She smiled again. “But, um, you could tell me some things about your secret male self, if you like. What was your name before it was Velva Linda?”

“It was Vicente.”

“Do you ever dress up as a man—Vicente?”

“Yes, whenever I go to visit my family, I do. I just did on my birthday, uh—yesterday? Yes, it was only yesterday.”

“Can I see you dressed as Vicente sometime? I mean, everybody thinks you’re Velva Linda now, and it might not be good to change that in public—but maybe you could discreetly change into Vicente for me every now and then.”

Velva Linda’s, or Vicente’s, eyes grew wide. Marguerite was looking away again, but she was blushing more deeply. The unimaginable, impossible thoughts that Velva Linda had been trying in vain to repel were now attacking her in full force, claiming to be quite imaginable and possible.

“Uh—wow! I mean, sure! Yes! Whenever you like!” Velva Linda blurted out. A strange thought struck her, and she had to add: “But—you mean you want me to live a *double life*?”

Marguerite laughed. “Well, yes, in a way, I guess I do,” she said. “I mean—the problem with the average

double life, I think, is that there's sin on one side and concealment of sin on the other, which amounts to the additional sin of hypocrisy. But if there's no concealment of *sin*, there's nothing necessarily wrong with concealing something, part of the time, that's *not* a sin—like you being a man named Vicente.”

“Well, OK, then, double life it is,” said Velva Linda. “Just let me know when you'd like me to, uh, not conceal that non-sin, and I'll be more than willing to oblige.”

“I'd like that very much, very soon,” Marguerite admitted. She blinked and frowned for just a moment, but then smiled again. “But can I just ask you one question, if you don't mind answering?”

“Well, sure. Ask anything.”

“You know how there are some men who think they're really women inside, and they need to get—uh—*surgery* to supposedly turn their bodies into women's bodies? Well—you're not one of *those*, are you?”

“Ugh! No! I'm sure not!” Velva Linda could think of only one reason why Marguerite would want to know that just now. The unimaginable, the impossible, might really be imaginable and possible after all.

“Well, that's good.” Marguerite's blush had not vanished, but she was looking directly at Velva Linda again. “All right, then,” she said, “I'm looking forward to seeing you—Vicente.”

Chapter 7

“Velva Linda,” Pete said on the phone not long after Velva Linda returned to her apartment.

“We've got to talk.”

“Why?” Velva Linda asked.

“I’ve been thinking about some things. I’ve changed my mind about some things.”

“Like the Everest expedition?” Velva Linda asked, hoping it was true.

“Yeah, that, for one thing,” Pete said. “Can we get together and talk?”

“OK, if it’s not at your place or mine. Uh, how about The Decencies?” That, Velva Linda felt sure, would always be her favorite restaurant from now on.

“All right. How soon can it be?”

“How about tomorrow for dinner?”

“OK. See you there at 6:00?”

“All right.”

“So, Pete, what’s on your mind?” Velva Linda asked when they were seated at a table in The Decencies, the same one where she and Marguerite had sat yesterday.

“Well,” Pete said, “You remember when you, I, and Marguerite were talking at the cathedral the other day.”

“Yes, sure I remember that,” Velva Linda said with a grimace.

“Well, I was mighty pissed when we got done talking,” Pete said. “I was *damn* pissed—I guess too pissed to think straight, or to notice what I was doing. I’ve driven on Semakoboomish plenty of times, and I knew it was one-way downhill—but somehow I blanked it out. I turned onto the street the wrong way.”

“Uh—that must have been very disturbing,” Velva Linda said. She didn’t think it would add anything of value to mention that she had seen the incident from afar.

“That’s for sure,” Pete said, “especially since I almost ran head on into a police car. The cop turned on his lights and siren for a minute, and then he got out of the car and started shouting at me: ‘What the fuck do you think you’re doing, you Goddamn pinhead?’”

Velva Linda almost laughed out loud, but stopped herself. “But I thought,” she said, “the Pacific Heights Police were trained to remain calm and polite in all situations.”

“Well, this one must have skipped that part of the training, or not paid attention,” Pete said.

“So, uh, what happened?” Velva Linda asked, wondering what this had to do with much of anything.

“When the cop finished chewing me out, he wrote me a ticket. I talked to our criminal and traffic law specialist, and he said I should be able to get on the TVDP, Traffic Violation Diversion Program. I did, but it cost me a thousand bucks. That sucked, but I figured I should do it and not have the violation on my record.”

“Well, OK. So—was *that* what you wanted to talk to me about?”

“Well, that was what started me thinking.” Pete was scowling and clenching his fists on the table, as if he didn’t like the things he had started thinking about. “I knew it would have been totally superstitious to imagine somebody was trying to—to *tell* me something by striking me down with confusion like that.” Velva Linda remembered Marguerite telling her about St. Norbert almost being struck by lightning, and turning his life around—but she wasn’t sure Pete would be willing to listen, and she lost her chance to speak about it.

“But I had to admit,” Pete said, “that there was *something* making me drive the wrong way, something I didn’t know about and couldn’t control. And then I had to start wondering if that *something* was making me do more than take one wrong turn on a street. Like, you know—in my *life*—making me drive the wrong way in my *life*. Making me really *be* a—a Goddamn pinhead, like the cop said.”

Velva Linda almost gasped out loud. She had thought she knew Pete fairly well, but she could never have imagined him admitting he was going the wrong way in his life and being a “Goddamn pinhead.” She had to ask: “Did you think that was happening?”

“Yeah, I did,” Pete said. “It wasn’t easy to admit, but I finally had to. I was fucked. All that shit about conquering females and disposing of them was just that—*shit*. Somehow I was forced to see that shit from the female’s point of view for a change, like, would *I* want to be fucked and dumped if I were them—and I knew I wouldn’t.”

Glory be to God! Velva Linda didn’t dare say the words out loud in front of Pete, but her heart did dare to cry out for joy within her. “So—uh—you decided to abandon the Everest expedition,” she said.

“Yeah,” Pete said. “I decided I actually needed to get married, and be faithful, because it was that same old fucked-up *something* that was making me think reality was nothing but fucking, blowing, dumping, and shit like that. I even thought about actually becoming a Catholic and marrying Marguerite.” Velva Linda held her breath. She didn’t want Pete to marry Marguerite. He *must* not marry Marguerite. Let him become a Catholic, yes, by all means, and marry a good Catholic woman—only not Marguerite!

“But then,” Pete said, “I thought about what you said about her never being willing to use birth control, and I thought that would be going too far. I

mean, I could handle marriage and faithfulness, but not *that*. I'd been wanting you to persuade Marguerite that birth control was OK before I started seriously trying to move in on her, because I was actually kind of worried that I might fall in love with her if I made my move too soon, before she made that decision. Then, if that happened, I might get sucked into the whole mom-and-pop trap. That's not for me. I've always been bratless by choice, and I'm going to stay that way."

Velva Linda let her breath out. She was sad for Pete, and horrified by the thought of what if Marguerite's parents had been "bratless by choice"—and yet she could not help being deeply relieved at the thought that she would not have to compete with Pete for Marguerite's affections.

Her relief did not last long. "So," Pete said, "I was thinking more about marrying *you*."

Velva Linda stared in silence. She should have seen this coming, she thought, but she was totally unprepared. How short a time it had been—could it really have been less than two weeks?—since she would have leaped, desperately leaped, at the chance to marry Pete! Now everything was different—but how could she tell Pete how different everything was?

"Uh—Pete, I'm honored," Velva Linda said, "but—I just can't. It wouldn't work."

"*What?* Why not?" Pete asked, looking astounded. "You *used* to want to marry me, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did," Velva Linda admitted, "but—well, I've changed a lot, just as you have, but even more." She was not going to let Pete know she was in love with Marguerite, but she had to say *something* about how much she had changed.

"You know how you wanted me to pretend I was a repentant sinner, to help you seduce Marguerite," she said. "Well, I started out to do it—but before long I wasn't pretending any more. I've really, honestly

been trying to give up sin—and I’ve decided I don’t want to marry a man any more, *any* man.” There, that was it. Now she would stop. She would not even hint that she did want to marry a woman—much less that the woman was Marguerite.

“Well, that really sucks,” said Pete. “That sucks *cock*. All because I was trying to get Marguerite, who I *didn’t* want to marry, I’ve lost you—who I *do* want to marry.”

“I’m sorry, Pete,” Velva Linda said, “but that’s how it has to be.”

Pete looked glum, even miserable. Velva Linda did feel sorry for him. She wondered if she could do anything to cheer him up. The only thing she could think of was far-fetched to the point of being ridiculous—but perhaps it was better than nothing.

“Um, you know, Pete,” she said, “There is a—a woman I know, I mean a woman like me, with a secret like mine—who might want to marry you, if she got to know you. I’m not sure, but I could see if she’d like to meet you. And I happen to know that she—uh—has extremely strong desires for sex, even stronger than mine.”

“How do you know?” Pete asked at once. “Have you done it with her?”

“Well—yes, I have. She, um—she had an incredibly powerful orgasm, and she made me have one too.”

“Does she want to marry a man?”

“I—yes, I believe she does.” This wasn’t exactly lying, Velva Linda reasoned, because the “woman” in question had wanted to marry *her*, even after finding out that she was really a male.

“Well, I guess it couldn’t hurt to meet her. All right, bring her on—I mean, if she’s interested.”

“Roger?” Velva Linda said on the phone soon after her dinner with Pete was over. “This is Velva Linda. Please don’t hang up on me. I want to apologize for some things.”

“Really?” Roger said. “Like refusing to marry me?”

“Well—no, not *that* exactly—but for, uh, leaving you alone with *nobody*. There’s somebody I know who would like to meet you, and *might* even be interested in marrying you, if all went well.”

Roger snorted. “So after Marguerite rejected me, and now *you’ve* rejected me, maybe if I get passed around enough, somebody won’t reject me at last?”

“Well, uh, that might not be the best way to put it. But please let me tell you about this. I mean—well, have you decided for sure that you’re not coming back to the Church?”

“I sure have. I tried as hard as I could to be a good Catholic. It didn’t work. I’ve got needs that absolutely have to be met, and the Church was telling me they didn’t.”

“Well, then—if you’re determined to disregard the Church and pursue the satisfaction of your own needs—this person I have in mind might be the perfect match for you. I mean, you know I’ve been a pretty bad Catholic sometimes, I’ve indulged in things the Church says shouldn’t be done—and this person gave me the most extreme satisfaction of *my* desires, even if they weren’t really *my needs*.”

“A male lesbian?” Roger asked. “Or a, a male lesbian bisexual—or something?”

“Well, not exactly,” Velva Linda admitted. “He’s a—a very manly man, but I remember you were saying you used to pretend to be a girl. So I thought, if you were willing to do that again—”

“*What?*” Roger shouted. “I told you, that’s *over!* I’ll never do that again! I guess maybe I can forgive you for bringing that up—but only if you never bring it up again!”

“Oh.” Velva Linda was shocked. She groped for words. “But, Roger,” she said, “you were plenty glad to have *me* play the woman for *you*. Why shouldn’t you make somebody else—like this manly man I’m thinking of—as glad as I made you?”

“That doesn’t make any sense,” Roger protested, without explaining why it didn’t make any sense.

Velva Linda sighed. She had done what she could. “Well, then, have it your way,” she said. “I mean—you’re going to anyway. Right?”

“I sure am,” Roger affirmed.

“God bless Velva Linda, or Vicente,” Marguerite prayed, “and keep him, or her, safe from every evil.” It was a very strange prayer, for the strangest situation she had ever been in. Now she was going to plunge into the heart of the strange situation, for she was going to see her friend Velva Linda turning out to be a man named Vicente. Never before had she imagined she might have any interest in a man who had adopted the appearance of a woman—but never before had she known anyone like Velva Linda.

She arose, genuflected, and walked out of the dimly-lit cathedral, leaving only a few people behind. Walking along Semakoboomish Street between the cathedral and the Big Black Block, turning onto Arthur Boulevard and heading toward The Decencies where she was to meet Velva Linda—or rather, Vicente—she tried not to think of the revolting homosexual activity in which her friend had so recently engaged with Roger. Vicente, though not Roger, had confessed and been forgiven—and, if Vicente’s future

really turned out to be a great deal better than his past, Marguerite wanted to be there to see!

She entered the restaurant. A man with golden-brown skin and a face like a pretty girl's face, somewhat shorter than herself, arose to meet her. His dark hair, brushed straight back, was long for a man's hair, but cut shorter than Velva Linda's hair had been. He wore a suit, and she had never seen him looking like this before, but there was no question who he was.

"Hello, Vicente," she said with a big smile. "I'm very glad to meet you!" She extended her hand, and the man shook it heartily. A waiter led them to a table for two near the back of the restaurant, and gave them menus.

"Well, Marguerite," Vicente said, "are you so glad to meet me because you already know I'm—your friend Velva Linda?" His voice certainly wasn't a bass voice, but it was definitely a man's voice, not a woman's.

"Uh—well, of course!" said Marguerite. "That's all right, isn't it?"

"Oh, sure!" Vicente said. "It's more than just all right." He smiled, exactly as Velva Linda had smiled before. "You could call me *Velva Linda y Vicente*," he said, "because I'm both."

"All right, I will," Marguerite said, "*Velva Linda y Vicente*—or Vicente for short." She laughed. Then another thought struck her, and this time she could hardly stop laughing.

"Do I get to find out what's so funny?" Vicente asked.

"I was just thinking," said Marguerite when she could speak, "how much of the pain of dating could easily be eliminated. I mean, when I've met guys on TCS, Totally Catholic Singles, it's been pretty painful because of course I hardly knew them at first, and yet

here we were evaluating each other as possible candidates for marriage, and if we didn't think it would work then there might be a lot of unpleasantness and we wouldn't be friends or anything any more. And of course they were *men*, and men can be—uh—pretty fear-inspiring, if you know what I mean. But with *you*—well, of course I don't know if you would ever really have any interest in this, but just imagine you and I were thinking about getting married. Even if we decided it wouldn't work, it wouldn't be a total disaster, because we could just go back to being two female friends, as far as anyone could see. No one but us, and God, would know there was ever any thought of anything different.”

Now Vicente was laughing too, laughing out loud. “So do you think that should be a requirement?” he asked. “A guy has to become your friend as a female before he can go on a date with you as a male?”

“Well, maybe not a *requirement*,” Marguerite said with a smile, “but it certainly could be helpful. I mean, it certainly *has* been helpful—for us—I think.”

“I think so too,” Vicente said. He was looking at her as if he wished he dared to say more, much more. He hesitated, but then went ahead and said it: “But look, Marguerite—how come you don't know if I would ever have any interest in marrying you? Are you really that unobservant?”

Marguerite heard herself making a sound, but she couldn't tell if it was a gasp or a laugh, or both. Her eyes were wide open and so was her mouth, until she tried to do something about it because she was sure she must look awfully silly. “Well, uh—maybe not *that* unobservant,” she said. Her racing heart would look as silly as her face, she felt sure, if only Vicente could see it. “But—what exactly was I supposed to have observed that would have, uh, given me the answer to that question?”

“Me,” Vicente said. “Me looking at you. Me wanting to be with you. Me trying to—to protect you from

Pete, and from Roger. Me trying to make myself not be totally unworthy to see your face. Me being terrified that you'd never want to see me again if you—uh—found out my secret, and found out all the bad things about me.”

Marguerite observed him now. His eyes were fixed on her, filled with yearning. Her heart was responding in kind. She had only to try to keep it from responding too ardently, too soon. She was not at all sure she would succeed.

“All right, I’m observing now,” she said, “and I may even see the answer.” She smiled at him, and saw his dark eyes light up with joy. “I guess I should discontinue my subscription to TCS,” she said, “while I—um—explore the implications of the answer. I mean, there would be no point in going on any more painful dates with strange men if—you know—that turned out to be unnecessary.”

“I sure hope it will,” Vicente said.

Marguerite took a deep breath and let it out slowly, with heartfelt relief. “You’ll understand,” she said, “that we’ll need to be pretty patient about this. I mean—well, frankly, it may take a while, for both of us, to be really sure you’ve changed your whole life for good, forever.”

“I want you to be totally sure,” Vicente said. “Take all the time you need.”

“Thank you,” Marguerite said. “And, uh—it may take quite a while to figure out how to explain this to my parents, too!” She laughed, but apprehensively.

“Are you ready to order yet?” the waiter asked. Marguerite hadn’t even seen him approaching.

“Pretty soon,” Vicente said. “Give us a few more minutes, OK? I mean, like, *quite* a few more minutes.”

“Yes, sir,” the waiter said.

“Well,” Vicente said when the waiter had walked away, “maybe we could start by explaining it to *my* parents—or at least my mom; my dad’s away from home a lot of the time. To my parents, I’ve always been Vicente; they don’t even know about Velva Linda. Anyway, I told my mom a little about you, and she was hoping you would, uh, become my girlfriend, and she could meet you.”

“Oh!” Marguerite laughed. “Well—now that you mention it, I’m pretty sure both of those things could be arranged.” She tried to say it calmly, as if it were the most natural, normal, unremarkable thing in the world for her to be starting to fall in love with a handsome man who was also a beautiful woman.

“Glory be to God!” Vicente said, softly but distinctly, echoing Marguerite’s own words when she had first met Velva Linda. “Maybe we could see your parents again this Sunday, and then go over to see *my* parents—and I can change clothes in between, in a public restroom somewhere along the way.”

“Yes, I’d like that very much,” Marguerite said, “especially the part about changing your clothes. I really think it would be an excessive shock for my parents to learn, so soon, that you’re Vicente as well as Velva Linda!”

“I promise you I won’t shock them,” Vicente said. “And, uh, about the other thing—I mean, you becoming my girlfriend—do you think there’s any chance that *that* might also be arranged by, say, this Sunday?”

Marguerite tried to keep herself from laughing too much for joy, but she didn’t succeed very well. She didn’t even *try* to keep from blushing, for she knew it wouldn’t work. “My dear *Velva Linda y Vincente*,” she said after a slight mirth-induced delay, “I’m sure that would be more than enough time for *that* to be arranged!”

The arrangements were made and kept. Again Velva Linda drove out to Beaconsfield, saw the two photos of St. Therese, went to Mass, heard Marguerite singing in the choir, and received Holy Communion—for she was keeping her resolutions, and it was far easier right now to keep them now than it had been before. Pete and Roger were keeping their distance, Marguerite was not keeping hers, and everything seemed to be going very well, at least for now.

After Mass, Velva Linda again greeted Marguerite's parents, and Marguerite told them she was going to visit Velva Linda's parents. "Oh, good!" said Marguerite's mom. "Where do they live?"

"In the District," Marguerite said, just as if she had said they lived in Seaview Grove, Belmont Hills, or some such well-to-do location. Nevertheless, evidently anticipating her mother's concerns, she added, "We'll be driving around on Belmont Drive to the far end of East Capitoline, so we'll avoid the worst part of the District. Velva Linda's parents actually live about as close to Belmont as to the worst part."

"Well, all right," said Marguerite's mom. "Please be careful."

Marguerite and Velva Linda both promised to be careful, entered Velva Linda's car, and drove out to Belmont Drive, which intersected Beaconsfield Road near the city limits. Near the corner of Belmont and Beaconsfield was a convenience store with one-person unisex restrooms. There Velva Linda entered a restroom with a gym bag, wearing a pretty Sunday dress and sandals.

Before long, Vicente emerged from the restroom carrying the same gym bag, but wearing a plaid men's shirt, khaki trousers, and men's running shoes. That was all there was to it; *Velva Linda y Vicente* took it in his and her stride, and so did Mar-

guerite. They then had a pleasant drive up and around the winding, tree-lined road through Belmont Hills, passing many beautiful homes both small and large.

The slope of East Capitoline Avenue down from Belmont Hills to the District was just as steep as from the Capitoline Hill on the other side, and the contrast between the neighborhoods was even greater, but at least they did turn off well before the worst part of the District. Soon they had entered the Buenazono home—holding hands, at Vicente’s suggestion—and Vicente was introducing Marguerite to his mom.

“Margarita!” Mom cried. “I’m so so glad to meet you!” She stood on tiptoe to give Marguerite a kiss on the cheek. Marguerite looked surprised and almost laughed, but quickly took her cue and kissed Mom too.

The visit was an entire success in Mom’s obvious opinion, and Vicente couldn’t disagree. Mom served a lot of the same kinds of food she had served at Vicente’s birthday party, minus the cake and ice cream. She asked many questions and soon learned almost everything there was to know, it seemed, about Marguerite. Aurelia had come with her kids, Eduardo looked upon the newcomer with wide admiring eyes, and Marguerite soon befriended them all. Even Arturo emerged from his room, fully clothed, to meet the tall, smiling lady who Mom said was Vicente’s girlfriend. If Marguerite had any thought that this wasn’t just as good a place for her to be as Beaconsfield, she sure didn’t show it.

At last their time came to leave. “Margarita, please come back any time!” Mom said. “My house is your house!”

“Thank you very much,” said Marguerite. “I’d like that. You’ve made me feel very welcome.”

Again holding hands, Marguerite and Vicente left the house, waved goodbye, and turned to go. “Hey,

Marguerite,” Vicente said when they were not far from the house, “my mom’s going to be watching us through the window until we’re out of sight. I know it would make her extra happy if she saw us, uh, giving each other kisses—I mean, just little ones, like you and she were giving each other. Do you think that would be OK?”

Marguerite looked at Vicente with her eyebrows raised high, as if considering the matter with great seriousness—but she seemed to be trying to suppress a laugh, and not succeeding well. “Oh, all right,” she said, “if it will make your mom happy.” Now she wasn’t succeeding at all, but she managed to put her arm around Vicente and kiss him on the cheek. He did the same to her, and they walked to the car with their arms around each other.

They turned to wave again at Mom, who, sure enough, was watching through the front window. Then they entered the car and drove away together. Vicente kept his eyes on the road, but his thoughts were racing far ahead to the future, and Marguerite was in all of them.

Chapter 8

Roger’s manhood was going down the drain. He could feel it going, leaving a void that could only be filled by one thing. Ever since he had made love with Velva Linda in the shower, his desire to masturbate like a man had vanished. In its place he encountered the old, urgent desire that had first come upon him at the age of 11: to pretend he was doing, with a manly man, the same kind of thing Velva Linda had now done with him. He was dismayed, and yet he didn’t know why he *should* be dismayed. Now that he had accepted the idea that it was quite all right for him to play the manly man in such a sexy scenario, why might it not be equally all right for him to play the woman—the *ultra-womanly* woman? Had Velva Linda really been right about that? Despite his indignant denial, did it make perfect sense after all?

It was a full week since Roger did it with Velva Linda. Astoundingly, he had not masturbated even once since that time—a record he had hardly surpassed even when he had believed that masturbation was a sin. He absolutely had to do it tonight, for he was bursting with sperm. The thought of doing it like a man, with a woman who didn't even exist as far as he knew, seemed boring and vacuous to him. No, Roger was going to overcome his dismay, pour his vanishing manhood all the way down the drain, and pretend he himself was Velva Linda.

His penis was already erect when he stripped for his shower. It was hard to force it down between his legs, but he did it, bending far forward at the waist to accomplish the task. Then he stood more or less upright and lathered himself up, starting with his chubby breasts, which had been a big embarrassment to him when he had to let boys see them nude in the shower room at school. He lathered himself between his thighs, just as Velva Linda had done. He gripped a shampoo bottle with both hands, pretending it was a manly man's penis, and plunged it into his new-made womanly opening between his hidden penis and his thigh.

Roger's excitement was extreme—greater than ever before. His eyes were closed, his mouth wide open, his head thrust back, and his hips were surely bucking at least as hard as any real woman's hips had ever bucked. "Oh, Roger!" he moaned in a high-pitched voice, pretending he was Velva Linda—but swiftly his pretense was transformed. Now he was himself, but his name was Rogerina, and he was making love in the shower with the manly man Velva Linda had told him about. By the time his orgasm was in full force and he was shooting spurt after spurt of semen rapidly backward behind his close-clenched thighs, while plunging the shampoo bottle frantically into his makeshift womanly entryway, imagining the manly man was ejaculating into him, he knew what he would do.

He finished getting clean and got out of the shower. He dried himself off and put his boring men's clothes back on. Then he called Velva Linda on the phone.

"Velva Linda?" he said. "This is Roger—but I've decided I'm going to be called Rogerina. You were right. I want to play the woman after all. Can you help me get some good women's clothes—and introduce me to the manly man you were talking about?"

Oh, no, I'm not quite done with my old double life! Velva Linda thought as she listened to Roger. She was pretty sure Marguerite wouldn't like this if she knew about it. She couldn't lie to Marguerite—but she had already agreed, so it seemed, to help Pete and Rogerina get together for sex, and possibly marriage.

I'll just have to do it without telling Marguerite, Velva Linda thought. Yes, she did want to help Pete and Roger, and she had more or less promised to do it. They had already decided they weren't going to live in accordance with Catholic teaching, after all; she wouldn't be inducing them to do it. It wouldn't be like *cheating* on Marguerite with Pete or Roger.

"All right, I'll do it," Velva Linda said. "I get most of my new women's clothes at Les Beaux Extraordinaires, and secondhand ones at the Movers and Shakers Thrift Shoppe. Do you want to go shopping this Saturday, and then I'll introduce you to, uh, the manly man, whose name is Pete?"

Roger did want to. Bright and early Saturday morning, he went first to Movers and Shakers with Velva Linda, and then on to Les Beaux Extraordinaires. By early afternoon Roger, now transformed into Rogerina, was loaded down with women's clothes, including the full outfit he—or she—was wearing. Rogerina's stylish wig, her big

fake breasts, her scoop-neck top, short skirt, and shoes with two-inch heels, all proclaimed the truth: that she was a male trying hard to pass as a female. Velva Linda had no time now for voice training, and Rogerina's falsetto was pretty squeaky, but it would have to do.

"Pete?" Velva Linda said on the phone soon after that. "This is Velva Linda. You know the woman I was telling you about, the one like me, who I said might want to meet you? Well, she does. It took her a while to decide, but she's ready. Would you still like to meet her?"

"You bet," said Pete. "Where and when?"

"How about the high end of Grand Stimson Park, near the corner of Capitoline, in an hour?"

"Done."

The meeting took place as planned. Pete smirked when he first saw and heard Rogerina, but Velva Linda was pretty sure he would be more interested in the prospect of incredibly powerful orgasms than in total feminine authenticity. That turned out to be true. Pete soon asked Rogerina for a date—to begin at once. Rogerina graciously and eagerly accepted. Velva Linda was profusely thanked by both for the introduction. As the three of them rose, she to return to her apartment and they to commence their date, Velva Linda noted yet another less-than-fully-authentic feature of Rogerina's quasi-feminine appearance: her skirt was distended in front.

Not many days later, Velva Linda was interrupted in her reading of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* by St. Francis de Sales (highly recommended by Marguerite) when Rogerina called her on the phone. "Velva Linda!" Rogerina said, sounding slightly more feminine than before; Velva Linda figured she must

have been getting some high-speed voice training, probably at Pete's request. "Thank you again, so much, for introducing me to Pete! I want to invite you to our wedding this Saturday, at the Big White Chapel in the Road on Queen's Bluff."

"Oh!" Velva Linda said. "Well, uh—sure, I'd like to come." The thought of inviting Marguerite entered her mind, but exited after not more than half a second. Velva Linda's old double life was ending, she devoutly hoped, but it hadn't fully ended yet.

She did attend the wedding on Saturday. Very few other people, none of whom Velva Linda knew, were in attendance. Pete wore a tux; Rogerina, a peach-colored strapless gown, not suggestive of virginity. They selected a traditional ceremony, executed the default pre-nuptial agreement, pushed buttons for their music selections, and entered the sanctuary to the tune of some old-fashioned processional music Velva Linda wasn't familiar with. There a man in a blue robe awaited them.

"Dearly beloved," said the man, "we are gathered today, on this solemn occasion, to join two persons together in marriage." He looked at a paper to verify the two persons'

names. "Pete, do you take Rogerina to be your lawful wedded spouse, to love, honor, and cherish, so long as your marriage shall endure?"

"I do," said Pete.

"Rogerina, do you take Pete to be your lawful wedded spouse, to love, honor, and cherish, so long as your marriage shall endure?"

"I do," said Rogerina.

"I now pronounce you lawfully married spouses," said the man. "You may kiss your spouse." This proceeded to occur. The kiss was long and lingering, highly suggestive of what Pete and Rogerina would do soon afterward.

At once the recorded recessional music started to play; Pete and Rogerina walked out of the sanctuary arm in arm. They got their marriage license and certificate, sat for pictures, greeted the few guests in the reception room, served and ate wedding cake, and left to have sex. That was it. Their married life had begun—and Velva Linda’s old double life, at last, had ended.

Velva Linda thought Marguerite’s parents most likely would not be interested, nor pleased, to hear about Pete and Rogerina’s wedding, so she didn’t mention it on Sunday. She did think Marguerite would at least be interested, if not pleased; after all, it *was* the wedding of two people she knew, though not a Catholic wedding. So it was that, on Monday after midday Mass, Velva Linda said, “Oh, Marguerite, I should tell you about the wedding I went to on Saturday.”

“Oh, too bad I wasn’t invited,” Marguerite said with a smile. “Who got married? Nobody I know?”

“Well, actually, it was two people you do know. One of them was Pete Stigmire. The other was Roger, now known as Rogerina, Randwicke.”

Marguerite stared with her mouth wide open. “Are you serious?” she asked.

“Well, yes. I was pretty sure you wouldn’t actually want to come to the wedding, but I did think you’d be interested to hear about it.”

“Oh!” Marguerite seemed to be unsure, but quickly resolved her uncertainty. “Well, yes! I certainly am interested! Please tell me about it. Um—I’m thinking they most likely didn’t promise to accept children lovingly as gifts from God, or anything like that.” Marguerite was keeping a straight face, although it didn’t seem easy for her.

“Uh, no, they sure didn’t do *that*,” Velva Linda said. “In fact, Pete told me he was ‘bratless by choice’—those are his words. Actually, that was why he didn’t want to marry *you*.”

“Was it really!” Marguerite raised her eyebrows. “Well, that was certainly a suitable reason for not wanting to marry me. It would be one of several reasons why I wouldn’t have wanted to marry *him*, too! But what *did* they do at this wedding? Did they promise to be faithful to each other for life, until death do them part?”

“Well, no, they didn’t do that either. It was just so long as their marriage endured—whatever that was supposed to mean.”

“And let me guess: they also didn’t promise to be faithful to God forever. Am I right?”

“Uh, you guessed it. There was nothing about God; it was all just *them*. But at least you could tell it was a wedding. I mean, Pete wore a tux, and Rogerina wore a peach-colored strapless gown.” (Marguerite wholly failed to maintain her straight face on hearing *that*.) “And they had what was called a traditional ceremony, with classical music for the processional and recessional; they executed a pre-nuptial agreement; a guy in a blue robe pronounced them lawfully wedded spouses; they had a marriage license and certificate, and wedding pictures, and a reception. And they did promise to love, honor, and cherish each other.”

“Well, that’s something,” Marguerite acknowledged. She looked around quickly, as if to make sure no one was listening. Then, drawing nearer, she said softly to Velva Linda, “But I’m pretty sure I’d much rather attend *our* wedding than *theirs*—I mean, if ours ever happens.”

Velva Linda looked at her in silence for a moment. Marguerite was blushing, more deeply than Velva Linda had seen her blush before, at this revelation of

her heart. Pete was right to discern that Marguerite had strong feelings, Velva Linda thought—even if he was totally, horribly wrong about what to do about them.

“I hope it will,” Velva Linda said, just as softly.

What happened next, to all appearances, was simply two dear women friends embracing. They did not kiss, even on the cheek, not yet; that would have been too much. They simply held one another, tenderly and tightly, for dear life—and then they parted for now. “God bless you, *Velva Linda y Vicente*,” Marguerite said before turning away. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“And tomorrow, and tomorrow,” Velva Linda continued the quote, “but we shall ruthlessly eschew all tales told by idiots!” They laughed together, and waved, and parted—but Marguerite turned back for one last momentary smile when Velva Linda called out, “God bless you, Marguerite!”

That was all, for now. Velva Linda watched Marguerite until she vanished into the Big Black Block. Then Velva Linda started to walk uphill, heading back to work, and to the rest of her life—a double life indeed, but a far, far better one than she had ever lived before.

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