JEZEBEL

Willie Redd

JEZEBEL

UNO

“Jorja, time to rise and shine, sistah.”

Huh? What is it now? Intuitively the femme fatale ignores her, stirring about on the tiny little bedcot, all sickly yet no less captivating in bleach-white shorty nightshirt, linen tossed artfully over much of one tit and just a third of the other. Quietly moping, bitching, pretending her noisy cellyluver has so prematurely awakened her when, cunning and calculating adventuress that Jorja Garcia is, she’s without question been up since before dawn. To wash-up and lotion down but also plot and scheme. To remove the shadows and powder the hollows as well as work her smuggled phones.

Welcoming warmth along its beachside ridgling, the hushed, salty rolling Pacific seas presents deceptively calm waters to the changing California coastline. In the common madness of a misty March morning, the slow-rising red sun smiles with increasingly stubborn brilliance, shining thru the narrow breakaway Plexiglas windows of the Special Units, commonly known as “The Beverly Hill Suites” – cozy but secure little roomlike cells assigned to the most infamous and villified.

Cancerous sunrays beam directly across the *señorita’s* face, faintly highlighting traces of indigenous in those K’iche ethno-cinematic features of hers. Café au lait. Keensome. With a natural arrogance. All Guatemalan gorgeous as she now lounges astir in her bunk. Creamed, perfumed, half-naked in naughty normalcy, dark café noir hair teased into studied nocturnal disarray. Hot with thoughtful anticipation and lust as she watches her bosom buddy Dee Dee standing before the mug-mirror just chattering away in that sexy southern drawl of hers.

“We got breakfast in twenty, Jorja baby,” the younger chic remarks. Bayou blonde, bowlegged, bootyfull in wee boxer drawers, damn near amazing this barefoot bimbo as she bends over the tiny sink to wash her face.

“*Tengo hambre.*” Suggestive smirk creeps across Jorja’s face as she sits up. “Not in the mood for food this morning though, delicious. Come here.”

Dee Dee stop what she’s doing, goes to her jailhouse luver. Bends and kisses her. Jorja seizes the broad’s wrists, pulls her down closer, impassionedly kisses her back with much tongue and saliva. Oh, how the Latina so luvs the soft baby feel of her skin. Smooth twenty-years-young wan porcelain flesh. Ponders to herself only fleetingly how, in what juicy secrets Denise’s long shared with her about Louisiana fried-and-forbidden culture, her brother and stepfather must have savored this here skin, and now truly miss seeing it, touching it, beating it, penetrating it.

“Oh Jorja, sweet honey. I’ma miss you like crazy. You’ve absolutely ruined me from liking man meat.”

“Patience, *bebé haba*. Another fourteen months and you’ll be right behind me.”

At eighteen Denise Edwards was but a southern snow bunny who’d been loyal enough – or foolish, depending on whom you ask – to cross statelines with some dick’s dope packs sewn inside Rent-a-Car seats. Fateful drive on I·10 that got her a 5-yr vacay in pussyrow. Pleasanton Fed to be factual. Almost immediately the countrified cutie became the youngest of those known as “Garcia’s Girls.” Small group of fine incarcerated bitches belonging to one of the American underworld’s most notorious hot young *señoritas*. . . .

Where Jorja Garcia has been bidding for the past nine and a half years, notedly. Maintaining her sanity. Her sexy. Her syndicate.

Betwixt kisses and moans, Dee Dee murmurs one enquiry after another. Big pretty azure eyes wide. Looking and sounding so innocent.

“*Ser buena chica*,” Jorja shushes her impertinence. “Big sis sin’t gone anywhere just yet.”

“You’re right. We should enjoy these last hours together, huh?”

“Huh is right. Now strip for me. Slowly.”

Beside the bed Jorja finds her iPod. Turns it on. Sassy hip hop lightly flows from the small television speakers. Smilingly Dee Dee steps back a foot. Does a slow, awkward striptease. First peels out of her white ribbed tee shirt, then thumb-hooks her boxers and drags them down that foxy frame, letting the fitting boy undies fall about her delicate tweedy feet. . . .

Pert ta tas, shaven va-jay-jay, heart-shaped tush. Caged tender freak with a physique.

Standing up in ribald regard, Jorja throws off her shorty nightshirt while the blonde stoops to help pull down those cottonstring Passion Bait panties.

And Jorja’s a jewel. An exotic 5’7, desirable as harlot’s heaven. Small-boned, curvy, tiny waist, wealth of coffee dark hair tumbling down her colorful Spanish-inked back to draw obscene attention to her bodacious rounded booty.

“I wanna dance with you.”

“Nothing betwixt us but air and arousal.”

Thus dance they do. Hugging, rubbing, gripping, grinding. Very slowly and sensually. Almost savagely Frenching. The Cajun sexkitten and brown bombshell. Morning makeout session gathering fevor hot as goatish hell.

The younger hottie-with-a-body displays a stingy mouth with horny expressions. A serious fuck-face that counts the tattoos on the Latina’s arms and chest while she lips her. An Amerindian symbol on her lightly-haired right arm, symbolic Quiche languaging on the other. Indigenous Mayan swords crossing the freckly cleavage of those breathtaking, porno-wondrous knockers. And just below her jutting navel, directly above her sweet pussy fuzz, a black-and-yellow queen bee, flanked by tiny bumblebees tatooed in flight around her lower belly and seemingly flying up from down an entire left leg, where an African honey flower is embellished atop the foot in yellow and red and gold ink that curls over in drips about the ankle.

Miss Bitch mistress on the deck.

Countless farewells and *hasta luegos* from sistahs and *señoritas* that “belong.” Mothers and daughters, gangstresses and black widows, alleged architects of this big shocking American tragedy or that, even so-called national POWs and political prisoners. All show respect for the not so respectable. Always nice to see someone go free.

Then there’s Sway Johnson. Chicago hoe, broke back door snatch – pick a cliché. Jacked up bulldyke built like a Thunderbyrd bottle but wearing a uniform three sizes too small. Off-colored goldcaps on her teeth as though she exemplify “hoochie hustlah.” Can’t tell that crow she ain’t fine, though.

Now, she stands all the way on the other end of the large, active dayroom area. Her and the two mudducks that she quacks with. Muttering, glaring, mean mugging.

Sway Johnson loathes Jorja Garcia for any number of reasons. Other-people’s-pussy and jailhouse status being a few. Yet unlike most haters, however, Sway chose to abhor her openly. *Refreshing*.

“Jorja Garcia.” A uniform turn-key appears. Calls her number at last. “Walking tall. All the way.”

In unison all activity in generation pop stops – cards, chess, dominoes, conversation, tv chatter – and every face in the place stands in cheery applause. Black, white, yellow, brown. All except Sway and her cohorts, whose true colors shine so bright at this fine time it threatens to blind.

*Stank whore thinks i’m stupid enough to revolve. Pity.*

Jorja ambles to the dormitory doors with Dee Dee and a couple homegirls helping with her bags.

“Luv you, Jay bay.” Shamelessly the teary-eyed blonde plants a sloppy kiss on her mouth.

“Call me,” Jorja tells her. Then taking her second bag and shouldering it, she says to the pair *homias*: “wait until I step outside these gates, then make me hear ya.”

“*Muy bien*.” Nods.

Jorja is escorted to the administration building by uniform freindlies. Spends ten minutes going thru the motions of front office bullshit. Signs several docus, property sheet, book money balance, release forms.

Then, thru a host of metal doors she’s shown.

Outside, long fenced walkway leading thru towering twin gates, slowly sliding open.

Waiting before them, cocaine white Cadillac limousine, its rear door yawning. And standing there grinning in observance, stately laced to the New York nines, looking all fabulous and fine, is Dulce Diaz. Cutthroat Colombiana and Jorja’s closest chum since school children attending PS-53 in the Bronx.

With sharkish gray eyes Dulce gazes left then right. Towards either end of the roadway. Both partially blocked by California state trooper cruisers, their domelights silently flickering. Standing front in the road a couple uniforms prohibiting passage of news vans, media personnel, civilian protesters.

Jorja ignores it. Turns to stare back at the prison. On the courtyard, a heated game of volleyball’s been put on hold, its players and spectators now turn to watch the departure of Jorja Garcia. It will be something to talk about the remainder of the day, tomorrow, and years to come.

Just as Jorja steps foot outside the final gate, a free woman once more at mid-thirties and for the first time in a decade, prison riot horns are suddenly blaring.

Smug smile as Jorja climbs into the stretch. Sway Johnson’s just been introduced to the cludge game of the Boss Bitch’s old kick-ass crew. Likely giving that face of hers the worse buck-fifty that a prison-made boxcutter can deliver. Ouch!

Within moments, the limo purrs to life and eases out onto the roadway. State troopers clear a path thru reluctantly obliging crowds.

Jorja Garcia is returning home.

DOS

In the progressive state of New York and its capitalist political arena, the name Matt Rogers is synonymous with two things: conservatism and controversy. As a West New Yorker representing one of the Empire State’s reddest districts in Washington, the US Congressman has a reputation of being, at times, not so politically correct. A magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa from Yale – the Ivy for conservatives and Old South sympathizers – a self-promoting American Patriot whose served in uniform during two military conflicts, Congressman Rogers chairs the influential House Comittee on Ways and Means, and, by all acounts, is presently the most powerful single individual in DC behind the speaker and the president.

Rightwingers luv the man while lefties luv to hate his guts. Both talk radio and Fox News cable channels tout him as a True Believer. The Second Coming of some mundate neocon that few outside the Beltway has even heard of.

In any event, Congressman Rogers means business.

According to the old legislator, a new breed of organized lawlessness has taken hold of this great nation, and almost all of it perpetrated by shadetree characters he refers to as “boat people.” Thus he’s taken the federal initiative, attacking the problem on four major fronts: immigration, location, license, and loans.

Recently, in this era of budget cuts, shortfalls and plain ol’ austerity, the US House Ways and Means Commitee found money to triple funding for the Immigration & Customs Enforcement agency, known as ICE, and has encouraged everything from illegal worker roundups to the forcible closure of foreign-oriented establishments operating without proper permit.

Oh, and let’s not forget the sweeping national crime bill inwhich the congressman is currently co-sponsoring and planning to introduce on the house floor. Folks think the Patriot Act is a wild eagle, just wait.

Yet even Matt Rogers needs a breather every once and a blue moon.

This afternoon proves fairly warm by New York scale. The elder statesman spends the day in the Big Apple. Because his own west state district is rather small and rural, it makes him that much larger. Contrary to belief, big cities like NYC means fewer eyes prying. And really, how many urbanites out walking the bustling streets of any city knows his own congress person by face, let alone someone else’s? Not many.

In the Big Apple, Congressman Rogers spends half the day out on the town. Dines with an unknown woman at Per Se, one of six upscale restaurants housed in the Time Warner Center at Columbus Circle in Manhattan. From there, the crammy southwest corner off Central Park that hugs traffic, the married congressman promptly hauls a taxi that takes he and the much younger woman to Gansevoort, a jazzy but discreet hotel on Ninth Avenue.

There Rogers has a prebooked room that allows him many priveleges and plenty privacy.

Come nightfall the illicit couple sneaks up to the rooftop garden.

“Oh, Matty, sugar,” the platinum blonde swoons in an Eastern European accent. “It is quite luvely up here.” Deep electric-hue eyes gazes out over glimmering downtown Gotham City with utter delight. An exclusive escort who regularly frequents choice resorts, this is actually her first glimpse of minimalist Gansevoort from up above.

“Luvely, eh? Glad you approve.” Rogers’ grin is almost predatory. Far from the practiced politician smile that has sorta become natural. His pastered gray hair fluffed slightly out of place from fooling around earlier in the room. “Now, how about some good ol’ mouth-to-mouth for the sake of mankind.” He produces a smartphone, pushes a button or two.

The whoring nursing student laughs like a teenage tease at hearing a nice number by Herbie Hancock fill the air. “A *subbota muna* with sentimentality, yes.”

“Come here and please me.”

He starts to unbutton the broad’s cheap silk dress, freeing those braless, perky little breasts. Her acting strong now. Artificial mane basking a brilliant white gold in the nightlight. Boldly madeup face persuasively slutty in its enticing expressions.

“Adultery. Indecent exposure. Public screwing. All so scandalous, congressman. What would your constituents think?”

“If they could see me now.”

“Some civil servant you are.”

Hot chuckling as she nibbles his chin, quickly worming out of their clothing. Till both are naked except for her cameo emblem coker and his sleeky socks. Without another moments waste, Rogers hungrily wraps his hairy arms around the slender courtesan’s pinkish-white figure, so suprisingly alluring in its anoxeria. Forcing her to feel the physical evidence of his excitement. His cock so fluid standing out from his paunchy body, rigid, oozing precum and pulsing so damn mightily she can sense it without looking.

Then, lifting his lady of the evening up into his arms with apparent strain, the congressman slips almost clumsily into the shadow end of the forty-five-foot heated pool. And just kiss, and whisper, and finger, and pull, and float, sitting back unbelievably beneath cooling night skies and soft mechanical jazz.

They neck, nudge and make various sex noises. Spilling their filled desires in hot, vaporous water splashing up about their waist. Rogers devours the expensive whore’s body with eyes and mouth as hungry as his hands and hardness. Grasping and pulling and poking at the pale nude form so smooth and half submerged in glimmering water, her bald pubic mound resembling a piece of clear jade underneath. A ball of pinkish-pale jellyfish compressed twixt thighs.

“Woman, my wife doesn’t do it like this.” He cups her asscheeks caressingly, her skin like satin under his palms, lifting her butt just above water. “Can’t get enough of you.”

“Oh, believe me, Matty baby. The feeling’s mutual.” The call girl lies with so much ease.

She rubs his head with melodramatic moans as he tongues her navel and that below it. Or as he tries to anyway. The dark mat of hair on his chest and potbelly looking like undeveloped seaweed floating in the water.

Rogers presses himself into her with new impatience. Feet sliding on the marble floor of the pool, almost psychosadistically shoving the whore under with each in and out. Wild pushes and withdraws put pressure on her pussy, causes it to vacuum then flush hot pool water with the flow of his dick. Squeezing hot pool water up inside her and back out. Over and again. Making her feel it in her gut.

His face buried in her chest as he fucks while hers twists in orgasmic approach.

Thus neither notices the person coming out onto the rooftop. Female. Colored. Indian perhaps. Maid uniform. Carrying folded towels in her arms.

Grunting in the pool, Rogers’ muscles wrestles with the whore’s, her slippery little boobs, belly and long legs sliding up and down his bent frame until he’s shaking in high excitement. Dirty, forbidden sex helped along by the hot pool, which seems to lift him like an iceberg stirred up by climatic sea turbulence. Higher and stronger. Amid the bedlam of bodies bumping in ecstasy his bust is long and noisy and violent.

“Ohh! Good Lord. . .”

“Yes, *yes*. Sock it all to me, baby. Every last drop.”

Five grand for the fuck of his life. Conforting claim at the moment.

“Wow, Matty. You demon, you.”

“Wow is right.” His chest swells.

Together they marvel some at his whitish thick semen in motion underwater. Seeping back out of her like tiny little tadpoles. Slowly swimming to the top like jelly eggs surfacing.

“Having fun, are we?”

Startled, the congressman and his whore turn towards the voice. Sees the uniformed woman for the first time.

“Oh no! Matty, look at us!” the escort hurries to hide her naked body behind his. A modest whore all of a sudden.

“Ahh, geesh!” Rogers shrinks. Lowers himself down into the pool. His whore doesn’t miss a beat. “This isn’t what it looks like. It’s my nightly swim. For my back. She’s my chiropractor,” he tries to explain.

Slowly the woman ambles towards the pool.

“Oh, no, no, we have towels. But thanks anyway. Now leave please.”

“Congressman Matt Rogers?” the woman proceeds approaching. Glimmer of recognition in those raven black eyes of hers.

“That is irrelevant, and you I am afraid are irreverent. Your maidal duties does not direct you to the rooftop area at this late hour, of that I am sure.” Rogers’ words are stern. “Now, get lost, or I’ll have your job, lady. Get me angry and there’s nothing that a union rep or anyone else can do to save your ass. Bet’cha bottom dollar on it, honey.”

“*Sí*. Congressman Matt ‘Mean-Mouth’ Rogers. It’s you, all right.” The uniformed woman allows a cold, almost conniving smile. Glossy black beautymark just above her mouth.

Cooly she pulls a small silencer-equipped firearm from the towelfolds. Too casually, as though by habit. Points it down at the horrified face in the pool. “Respectable representative stuffing his sausage up some hooker’s ass in the meatpacking district. How ironic.”

Speechless the politician, shaking his head *no* as his whore chokes out a scream.

Two quick shots like taps, then twice more. The loudest noise from empty shellcasings scattering across the rooftop pavement.

In the pool both bodies fall backwards with baptizing swiftness. Double impact. Headshots from hot tip leadons. Crushing pituitary glands, severing brainstems, meaning unquestionable death.

Oh, how the killer bitch understands these things. Briefly she watches as blood from the corpses commence to spread thru the pool, reddening the blue-green water like cancer.

Then she’s gone in a quiet exodus with ol’ Herbie graceously doing the honors.

PART ONE

TRES

*Charlyne Gomez*

A little after ten this morning One Police Plaza hums with more hubbub than normal. I amble a bit hurriedly up the lower corridor of eleventh floor homicide. Not so much as a gaze towards my own office. Arrive five minutes late for the briefing.

“Lieutenant Gomez. Nice of you to finally join us.”

“Tight schedule, captain.” Few chuckles.

“Yet still you manage to fit this department in it. I’m flattered.”

Quickly, quietly I maneuver my way thru a couple dozen cops sitting round listening. Acknowledge one or two with an eye or a nod. Take my place next to my partner Nicholas McNabb. Fair-haired cutie pie senior detective with deep-set browns and urchin features. Looks at me with relief.

Captain Byron Levine goes on with his latest sermon. His frail figure growing animated as he moves about the head of the room. Those worn-looking rheumy eyes telling us more than he can put into words about the macroscopic nature of this case.

“There’s a firestorm brewing, ladies and gentlemen. Despite assumptions less than an hour ago by our ‘friendly’ media folk, we have no description of a suspect just yet. Although I’m sure we will soon. We better. By all visible accounts this was a hit on a sitting US congressman and so that brings the FBI in. We can suspect that they’ll try and play jurisdiction games with the investigation. But this one’s ours. . .”

Captain Levine goes on about the mayor and police commissioner. The immense pressure being placed on New York’s finest. By the end of this briefing that tells us next to nothing, we catch the drift. I know I do anyway.

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“So,” Nick starts after its over, “what do you think?”

“That little pep rally? Sounds like captain’s way of telling us to hang together or hang separately.”

“He did seem a whiff away from being scared shitless, didn’t he?”

“*Sí*. As he should be,” I point out. “Budget cuts, major complaints, lawsuits, undertrainned officers who can’t shoot straight, others engaged in God knows what. Our department’s been a total mess under Levine and this new commisioner’s tenure.”

Back in our unit I stop in front of the coffeepot. Make us both a cup while half studying my reflection in the tinty glass backdrop. Little nose delicately sculpted in fine bones covered by olive-colored skin that doesn’t look so milky and flawless this morning. Pair cheekbones to die for but starving a few shades of Merle Norman. Big electric hazel eyes could use a little mascara, too.

I run a hand thru my hair, a curling bunch of streaky dark, brownish, golden locks everywhere. Carefully hand Nick his cup first. Don’t wanna spill anything on my new Prabal Gurung, a menswear-inspired gray vest with feminine, lacy accents, over a jet-black blouse that looks rather striking against the designer white Latinbloom necklace my daughter recently bought me for my thirty-seventh birthday.

Dark skintight pinstripe pants hugging the curves of my fair-boned figure like a jealous luver. Irrevocably showing off an admittedly beautiful bubbled ass and rounded thighs that don’t look nearly as perfect when I’m naked.

No less ladylike and luxe for a cop though. Thus I can’t complain too loudly. From the looks I get in this place you’d think I was the hottest *señora* with a gun and badge on her waist. Or divorced *señora* anyway.

Yes sir, I read *Honey Money*, the British classic about driven women using their sexy in the workplace. And the NYPD is no different. The police world is made up of a multitude of communities or families, and most rallying points for almost everything are in divisions, cop bars and on the beat even, than anywhere else. Intimate little person-to-person networks that are practically breeding grounds for casual romances or just stress-free sex. Although I did mess around with a sergeant once from midtown’s north precint 18 that proved to be a real ache in the ass.

Now, however, cops no longer appeal to me. At least not in general. They are more or less my equal. *Familia fuera familia.*

Nick and I spend the remainder of the morning running round working the Rogers double-murder. On the phone tracking down phantom leads. Doing computer searches. Trying to think outside the box. Our division is due a big change over. Everyone who is anyone with administrative authority is thinking not just Diversity but Woman this year. Not just for promotions and whatnot but in life. And I like believing I’m that *mujer*. A pretty creditable Latina. Or as we liked to say back in our old Spanish Harlem neighborhood coming up, a Nuyorican, which is the term that refers to a New Yorker of Pueto Rican descent.

Later, much later, I’m at my desk, legs casually crossed, tall blackleather buckle boots propped up, when Nick comes barging over.

I look at him. “You have something, detective?”

“Follow-up interviews were conducted with all the staff and guests at Gansevoort that night. Still no one remembers anything outside the norm.”

“Lucky us.”

“Only a bellhop appears to recall a hotel maid on duty that night.”

“And that’s strange because. . ?”

“He hadn’t see her before, nor since.”

I sit up fast in my chair. Take a moment to mull over this bit. “Okay, here’s what I want.” I stand. “Have every single employee working in or around all the buildings on and off Ninth Avenue questioned.”

“Eddie and CSU are all doing that now, as well as the feds – “

“*No, ninguno*, Nick. I want our team on it also. So that it’s done with our local thoroughness and thoroughfare fine lining.”

“Plus, we’ll go bigger and wider, cast a greater net.” Nick jots in his pad. “Shake a few trees and call in some favors.”

“*Exacto*,” I nod. “Someone saw something, pal. Something that they thought was nothing. A passing cabbie. A vendor from three or four days ago. Tourists travelling Ninth far back as a month ago. Somebody. And we’re gonna find them.”

CUATRO

One of the first responses I get comes from a long time snitch of mine. A *profesional rata*, or informant to be PC about it, and *un perro grande* wannabe from Black Harlem named Fat Ronnie. I’d been calling, paging, leaving coded messages. His elusiveness getting on my last nerve.

We’re to meet at a soulfood joint near Jamaica, Queens. Ten minutes from Ronnie’s latest rathole.

After a couple more hours handling other related work at HQ, working the phones or whatever, I leave Nick and others to continue focusing on whatever it is they were doing. Hop in an unmarked and make the solo journey to West Long Island with time to spare.

I get to the Moms-n-Pops eatery and Ronnie isn’t there yet. *Mierda.* Again I page the idiot for the umpteenth time this afternoon. Decide to wait just a bit while longer. I buy a soda, Diet Coke, then post up outside the little sidestreet establishment. Voix de Ville safari fedora hat pulled down over my golden brown locks. Police badge gone. Nine millie beneath my J Crew seersucker.

Ten more minutes past. He’s not coming.

“*Un pobre muchacho, la peor imbécil. Mentiroso.*” I’m so pissed I flavor my mumbled insults with an accent as thick as my late grandma’s, all but spitting my Spanish out I’m yakking so damn fast. “*Cuanto más se vivire, tanto más se aprende.*”

Back in the unmark, I phone in while pulling out. “This is Gomez. Have them issue an arrest warrant for one Ronnie White. Try probation detainment.” That oughta teach the bastard.

I need to go east but turn farther west instead. Head deeper into the borough of Queens. Hazel eyes open wide behind Swarovski shades even though the sun’s receding. Scanning the streets and alleyways. Something about the changing, slightly decading borough that makes me feel like both a homegirl as well as an outsider. The old and abandoned houses. The spray-painted buildings. Groups of hoods here and there, on corners, watching me as I slowly ride by.

I smell it before I realize it.

Several blocks on I turn right. Main road not far. It leads to a freeway.

“*¡Qué lástima!*” I notice smoking coming from beneath my hood.

The vehicle starts to act up. Shaking, jerking, gagging, lurching like a wounded rhino readying to take its last gasp. It slows. Couple cars behind me wheel right on by.

Just up ahead I spot a Quickmart. Manage to get the sedan there before it conks out on me completely. And by now it’s not just smoking but shooting steam. Trembling and convulsing in place like the parking lot grounds’ trying to still a seizuring Caprice.

I jump out just as a Carolina blue muscle car slowly motors up alongside one of the pumps. A vintage mustang on shiny wheels big as a ferris, silver pipes muffling, damn oldies humming like King Kong is locked in his trunk. I don’t know nor do I particurlarly care what the guy driving thinks of me when he climbs out. But what he sees is a burning hot Latina with silky wild, slightly curly hair fluttering about as I huff and puff off, cursing the car in Spanish in my wake.

I snatch off my Swarovski shades. Dig my phone out from my pocket. Who can I call. I have Triple-A, *sí*, but this is an unmarked from the department’s lot, not my personal vehicle.

The guy disappears into the Quickmart while I struggle to get the hood of the car up before dialing a number. I call the station to check up and nothing more. No sense in hindering progress or diverting resources simply because an officer’s car has gone bust on the other side of another town.

“Owh!” I yelp because I think I broke a fingernail. The glittery golden polish good and chipped. Screw this.

I dial another number, this time my fiancé Mitchell. He says he’s working right now unfortunately, or not, overseeing construction layouts on an upstate site at the moment. He suggests a tow and a taxi. Asks me not to have expenses billed to him, though.

Joker, puleeze. Only a moron expects a carrier or a cabbie to come thru the grimey section of Queens. And as if to prove my own long-nagging point, this is why Mitch and I have yet to jump the broom – and me for a second time, God raves. He and I moved in together three years ago. Before my daughter Calisia was accepted into Saint Mary’s at Notre Dame. Before Mitch’s son Stephun started his second year of grade school at Tri Holy Family.

Most of my sorors and other friends are loco jealous. Mitchell’s smart, good-looking, successful, drives a fly whip straight from Germany’s select factory. Yet if they only knew. Let me hush.

Anyway while I’m quietly bitching my crossed luck and scanning thru my phone’s facesaver, the guy casually comes back out of the store. Bagged bottle of something in his hand. Heads to the pumps.

“Excuse me.” I amble over, catch him while he’s pumping gas. “Do you know anything about car motors?”

CINCO

His name is Chad W. Freeman. Tall. Swarthy. Arresting. Almost pretty for a muscular man, infact. Somewhat stud thug type. The kinda *hombre* I’ve hauled off to jail many a moons. I don’t let on I’m a cop though.

I stand watch as he mucks and pokes around under my hood. Wonder where he is from. The plate on his classic has on it the abbrev “Bk” which I take to mean Brooklyn. Nice Pierre Cardin blazer over white Urban Graffiti tee-shirt. Trendy Timbos. Meticulously iron-creased Girbaud jeans slightly fitting. Quite a few hints of hipster going on.

Hood repper, if I had to guess. Have to be with those silly numbers tatooed left side of his neck. I run his name and tag number thru my phone without him seeing.

I ask, “Any idea what’s wrong with it?”

“Locked engine,” he mumbles. “Radiation system’s shot. Stuff overheats and the engine drive malfunctions.”

“No kidding.” I bite my lip with a groan. Smear my strawberry chocolate lipstick over my pearly whites. Last thing I need right now is to be charged with repairing the whole darn engine of an unmarked I only barely drove. “Locked, huh?”

“Like a Swiss safe.”

“Is locked engine the same as broke engine?”

“Certain cases.”

I swear in Spanish under my breath.

“I tell you what.” Chad checks his silvery watch. Glances out and about. “I’m on my way to visit my peeps down South. I can take you to your destination if it’s in that direction. You can worry about repairs later.”

“Really? And you sure it wouldn’t be an inconvenience for you?”

“Piece of cake, I tell ya.”

I’m able to meet his gaze with no trouble. Not much menacing in his fairly smooth, young face. Those eyes a rather strikingly bright sorrel shade. Not to mention him smiling reinforces a general sense of ease. I should probably smile back but don’t. Do that and a guy swears to high heaven you wanna make magic with him.

“Okey-dokey then,” I say. “Let me just lock up the car and run in the store and grab a few things. Soda or chips for you maybe?”

He wipes his forehead with a blue handkerchief. “Yeah, that’s cool. Now that you mention it.”

Blue bag. I hope he isn’t a damn Crip banger or whatever. Or the junkyrapistfreewaykillerman falling into the NYPD’s lap. In the store I search his name. Find a Chad Welcoh Freeman. Black male. 27 years of age. Single felony conviction for second degree robbery. Single felony conviction for second-degree robbery for which he served time in Attica State Corrections. **Oh my Lord!** That was five years ago.

More recently, however, he’s help put on or starred in countless Off-Broadway plays, from Actors Playhouse and Triad and Stage 42 and Cherry Lane to Orpheum and Lucille Lortel and Julia Miles Theatre and Duke on 42nd Street! And half to critical acclaim!

According to **TimeOut New York**, Chad Freeman never cease to transcend acting into some place just beyond the mind. While the dancing musical **Come On Down** was rather cheesy and clearly a commercial endeavour forced upon him by unmet ends, **Ernestine My Mother** is a masterpiece!

A Theatrical state weaver of young brilliance, a black Shakespeare, writes a reviewer, while **The Village Voice,** its pages brimming with stunningly handsome photos of Chad in action, declares him “Chekhov, Wilde, Beckett and a little Sophocles, all in a single entity.”

Textbook rehabilitation, I decide with some caution. **Unbelievably impressive,** if I’m being truthful.

This should be interesting.

Good that he drives with both hands on the wheel. Quietly I sit passengerside, very inconspicuously peering about the car in study of its dramatic interior, from leather button on leather seats to wood grained frontal. Fresh, bold, hip.

Then there is the radio.

I smile, try not to laugh.

He notices. “Share?”.

“Your car radio”

“Yeah. What about it?”

“Any older and it would be a tiny jukebox.”

He chuckles. Cute.

Very cute.

“Ride’s a classic, ma. Didn’t wanna ruin it with too many modern day bells and whistles. Even the rims are factory throwbacks.”

“What model car is this anyway?”

“’68 Mustang GT. Bought it off an old head I used to work for.”

“Doing what, if you don’t mind me asking?”

*Nada*. I hate when guys do that. Ignore a female like it’s more favorable. Then respond when it suits them to answer. Like a good detective I’m blasé about it though. I lean in and change the radio from station to station, channel surf from oldies to Hip Hop to jazz to R&B to soft rock. Turn its volume down to nearly the lowest decimal. Just happen to repeat my question and wait to see if he answers me this time.

“Did a lot of stuff I’m not proud of now, nan’mean?”

“Fair enough. So you’re from Brooklyn?”

“West Indies by way of Bushwick, yeah. Just like my pa, I’m told. You?”

“Spanish Harlem.” Little truth can’t hurt. “Mama was *las domestica* for much of her life. Papá drove delivery trucks.”

“*Las domestica* is something to do with undocumented immigrants, yeah?”

“Now days, *sí.* But for natural citizens like my parents who’d originally migrated from the US territory island of Puerto Rico, *las domesticas* are equivalent to their generation’s housekeepers, nannies, maids, surrogate mothers.”

“Ah,” Chad nods. “Interesting.”

He comprehends quite well. Point for him.

“So, *Señor* Freeman, what do you do when you’re not riding around bumping loud music and helping old ladies across the street?” I’m polite about it. “What do you do to make your living?”

“Performing arts. Little writing, stage acting, things of that nature.”

“Broadway?” As if I haven’t a clue.

“Nah, not yet. Maybe not ever. But some things are too important to be left to the laws of the market.”

“You any good?”

“Yeah, I think so. I don’t pay any attention to the critics. Hell, I don’t even ignore them.”

“He’s easy to confab with even as he drives. I pry a little but try not to coax him like a perp. He shares a bit more about himself. Talks about coming up in the house of his father, a broken man who died spiritually struggling with a pastor knocking at the frontdoor and a coke dealer at the back.

Even now I can hear undead pain buried in the back of his voice. Though I don’t know him at all personally, and surely not enough to be trying to gauge his feelings and expressions, individuals who’ve been hurt recognize it in others.

I ask about the numbers tatooed on his neck.

“Thirteen and a half?!” He goes quiet. Focus a minute on driving. Finally answers, “Something I got done back in the day, when I was put away upstate for living like an animal, regrettably.”

“But what does it stand for, thirteen-and-a half?”

“Symbol of trial and tribulation,” He murmurs clearly. “Twelve jurors, one judge, half a chance of going free.”

Such a man. Quiet baritone voice. Colorful ink telling some dark tale or another on smooth caramel brown skin. Bygone worlds living in his shaved head. Although he appears so cool and peaceful, I’m sure there’s plenty going on inside him. Would I want a *hombre* like him in my house if I were single? A guy who feels and thinks a lot? Mitch is indifferent about a lot of things.

“Chad Freeman.” I pause in thought. “You aren’t by any chance related to the Freemans that owns the big ol’ clothing place in Brooklyn, are you?”

“Oh, you mean Friedmans’ Urban Accessories?” He says, lulling me into unwonted familiarity.

“That’s the one,” I nod a bit spirited. “Big huge family runs that place. Had a couple stores in Harlem once, too.”

Chad looks amazed. “No, no. But those Friedmans are African-American. Ours are Afro-Israeli.”

“Boy, hush yo mouth.” I’m genuinely suprised. “*No way.”*

“Yes way. Used to be Freemanthal. We shortened it to Freeman back when the rockets started falling on a regular.”

“No! Really?”

“Nah. Not really. Just joking, ma.”

He glances over at me grinning from ear to ear as if I’m his one-person audience. Blushingly I laugh and decide that I am in luv. But seriously, he is hunky in his own nonchalant way, that self-mocking grin even more attractive up close. The whole of him warmer, a bit more complicated, handsomer than I initially gave him credit for. Faint scar across his chin, slight furrows along his bare forehead as well as squint lines around those bright sorrel eyes save him from unbearable prettiness.

“Freeman is actually a quite common name among blacks in America, historically speaking.” Chad is serious again. “Lotta our forefathers took the surname Free-Man the after the Civil War was won and slavery abolished.”

Fascinating. In Latin countries like Dominican Republic court orders are passed down to stop Hispanic parents from naming their kids after car brands and cartoon characters. Not difficult to find a Mazda Altagracia, Toshiba Fidelina or Seno Jimenez – as in Breast Jimenez – somewhere out there walking around or in some Latin nation’s civil registry.

“So, Spanish Harlem girl, huh?” he says when the top of Manhattan slowly comes into view.

“Indeed. Though I haven’t lived there in years.”

“Where God creates feminine gold dimes pieces from the gutter. Am I right or what?”

I laugh. “That’s the fancy line description everyone used to use when talking about Rosie Perez.”

“The actress, yeah. You kinda look like her.”

I frown. “How old is she?”

“Not sure. She’s getting up there though?”

“Your comparison’s ridiculous.”

“Rosie’s beautiful,” he replies plainly. “If ever I *were* given the opportunity to put on some big Broadway production or write a certified Hollywood box office movie script, she’d be without question the first choice on my list of leading role candidates.”

I chuckle at his dreamy insights. “What?”

He keeps at it. “Yo, not to sound shallow or objectionable, but ma looks are legendary round my way. Bohemian hairstyles. Phat body. Saucy, devilish face. Feisty aura. I can go but at the risk of sounding like a possessed observer.” He laughs.

“And you think I look like her?”

No response whatsoever. Just that fast his attention is redirected towards the road and his driving. Still I’m just sitting here thinking. Surprisingly enjoying the quiet convo and complimentary closeness of our ride. Not to mention a Diet Coke and a smile. Oh, and the feelings I’m fighting. Let’s just say that my peter heater’s humming about a hundred degrees fahrenheit, and rising.

In Manhattan at long last, I have Chad pull over in front of an office building two blocks away from One Police Plaza. I ultimately decided not to tell him what I do for a living. Initially it was because I needed his help. Not now though. I actually like him, and subconsciously I think I’m a little concerned with how he might see me.

Telling a guy you’re a cop is penis repellent. Guys with certain history especially.

Chad climbs out the car. Comes round to open my door like a good little Boy Scout. Umph, umph, umph! Can’t help but notice his heft, and the size of those feet.

“Well, here we are.” I get out. My Puerto Rican accent twice more pronounced than normal, which also happens when my hormones starts raging. “Thanx again, Chad.”

“No biggie, ma. Told you that already. I enjoyed the company.”

“Still, if you hadn’t come along when you did I’d probably still be stranded now.”

Warmly we shake hands with agreeable smiles.

“Ya know, Charlyne, you should swing by the Indie Theater and see me sometime. I’ll be there, ahh, Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays all this month.”

I brighten a bit. “I just may do that.” I nod amiably. My own sly way of flirting. Very subtle, sure, but flirtatious no less.

“Stay tight, ma.”

And that’s all he says before hopping back into his vintage mustang and motoring off. Oh well.

Back to headquarters I go. I’m told the team is working hard while waiting for me to show.

SEIS

*Ruth Desposyni*

At two in the morning I wake up next to a stranger. The second this week to be exact. Moping and griping as I often do when I’m unusually tired still. After all, very little sleeping went on in this bed last night.

“Ruth?” the babyfaced stranger murmurs against the feather pillow. Those cocker spaniel eyes still shit.

“Go back to sleep, *bébé*.” I kiss my hand and lightly press it against his cheek before slipping out of bed. Which feels sorta silly considering we’d spent a good portion of our time together mouthing each other’s body parts.

“I need to get a little writing done.”

Everyday before dawn, several hours till sunrise, I’m at my laptop or with an ol’ pencil and pad in my hand. Recreating a particular time, expressing my mind, trying to meet some deadline. No matter what country or what home I’m holed up in, long ago discovering that I work better when much of the world is gone quiet and asleep.

En route downstairs I throw on the first thing I find. Thin ruddy-colored robe left untied so not quite concealing ripe tits, that had only gotten bigger since the birth of my Ussie, or the silky black fuzz betwixt my thighs. I make camomile tea. Turn the wall visual on CNN, mute, and spend a minute checking out the news crawler.

I find a roach of reefer. Half a joint leftover from last night. I fire it up. Puff, puff away. In no time my catsy gray eyes subside. Drifts towards the huge bay windows out beyond the Lake Ontario strait.

The ten-bedroom home sits on a private island just off of northern New York state with views of the Thousand Islands Bridge. Three-stories with four porches and two boat docks, the Victorian-era estate is what the nice people of Clayton refer to in their town brochures as a nineteenth century charmer.

It’s my favorite of the six properties I inherited from my beluved *pére*, the late great Usak Desposyni. *La immortel* whom I emulate.

After my old man’s death I needed space. Mourned a monsoon of tears for forty days and forty nights. The subsequent birth of my sunshine Ussie ultimately pulled me outta my runt. Then came Davie Nice of GlobalStorm, urging my involvement with the company and offering me a platform.

My first story to publish major was a perversely erotic meshmash using every superhero imaginable. The second involved simpler but no less popular cartoon characters engaged in everything from gangbangs to rapes to all-girl orgies. The third Harry Potter and ‘nem. All with graphic novels and short internet film followups. The response was friggin’ huge. Webbies went absolutely bananas. Strangers commence to email me like crazy. My animated videos generated millions of hits. Disney, Scholastic and a couple others eventually issued cease & desist letters attached with threats to sue for infringement. But by then it didn’t matter. The dye was cast. My persona born.

Lately, however, I wish to be taken a bit more serious as as writer. I mean, I’m twenty-four, and with a four-year-old bundle of energy-and-curiosity for a son. I’d like to be known as more than just Mlle. Ruth, the sexy young eroticist and advice columnist drowning round in daddy’s fortune.

Which is why I decided to try my hand at a bit of non-fiction. The project I’m currently working on is a kind of social exposé, tenously titled *The Devil’s Lair: Sex, Prostitution & Human Trafficking in the Modern Age*. And in less than six months I’ve interviewed dozens of police and social workers, former as well as current whores and gigolos, various criminals and victims all too willing to talk. Admittedly a few computer geeks from the research department of GlobalStorm’s magazine arm assisted me with old court papers, news articles and other stories on file in Montréal, New York, Paris, Algiers and whatnot, but I’ve personally done more leg work than even I’d’ve imagined a time ago.

So far *The Devil’s Lair* reads nice, too. Nothing so profound as to be earth-shattering, but my publisher-cheerleader Davie sounded pretty pleased the last we talked.

Then comes the release of Jorja Garcia.

Barefoot in but my flimsy robe I step out onto my south porch with breakfast in hand. Homemade pancakes thick in Canadie maple syrup, *poisson graviers* with buttered French toast, and freshly squeezed OJ. I take my sit at a fancy iron-railed glass table just beneath the afterglow of tall red-orange foliage.

I pick up the day-old edition of the *New York Times* and again scrutinize its frontpage stories. Both of them the week’s hottest and being talked about everywhere.

Recently released New York City Madam out for night on the town, spotted at Blue Fin.

US congressman, allege prostitute murdered during pool tryst, possible hit.

The notorious and wickedly seductive Jorja Garcia is, strangely and without a doubt, the most interesting of the two headers. A second-generation Guatemalan-American and Bronx native who pulled herself out of a hardknock life and escaped poverty to attend the esteemed Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, where after but two semesters studying fashion design and cosmetology, she went on to head up what would become one of the most prominent modeling & fashion agencies in NYC. Housing starlet-looking beauties and hobnobbing it up with designer names like Kors and Camuto and Burrows and Cooley and Lauren.

Yet in truth, Jorja Garcia had been marketing real-live male desires. Single and in her early twenties, the Bad Bitch Latina had tried, and nearly succeeded, in single-handedly monopolizing the world’s oldest profession in The Americas. Up until the day she was secretly indicted by the US federal government for tax evasion and embezzlement, and, following a three-month-long trial botched by the NY federal prosecutor’s office, subsequently sentenced a lousy ten years in fed prison.

That was some 120-odd months ago.

Now, *some* crazy congressman is killed while balling an unfortunate hooker. Coincidence? *Non, citoyen*. I don’t think so.

Ah, and apparently neither does the *Times*, for while browsing I peep the paper’s subtle attempts to draw links twixt the two stories..

In any case, *The Devil’s Lair* just got a whole lot interesting.

SIETE

After breakfast on the porch I get on my laptop. Actually try and get some work done. Like too few writers today, I believe in the sensational power and literary eloquence of accurately worded paragraphs to sear mental images. Fundamental finesse. The savvy and the soundness but also the sorcery of a work that no less comes thru innumerable unarticulated selections regarding style, formulation, frankness, ideals. Accuracy won’t kill animation no more than coital vivdness threatens vitality.

Yet some critics back home in Canade seem to think so. Others say that I’m a shallow representation of my nation. I say they’re all chowderheads. Especially in my case, a strong degree of erotication being inevitable and all.

Despite my vocation in literature, no one has ever called Usak Desposyni’s little girl dull or static. Excessive, naive, hopelessly romantic or haplessly raunchy, sure. Even slutty, and grotesque, and, unfortunately, deviantly sinister. But never static. Never boring.

*Assez*. I shut up the computer and get up from the table. So restless that I’m without the willpower to go another hour. Very slowly the morning sky is just barely starting to arrive when I return inside. Upstairs I find that my fuck buddy’s at last opened his eyes also.

Naturally I smile. “Morning you.” Can’t remember his name. Too embarrassed to ask.

“Hey babe.” Boyish grin makes ‘im look younger than I originally though. Oh Lord, his bare naked ass sliding crackwise across my SleepNumber mattress during his struggle to climb out. “Ms. Desposyni, you are one great piece of tang,” he cries in discovery.

“*Non, non*. Call me Ruth, partner. I’m barely grown.” Yet he looks even younger than I’m now thinking. Oh, but the boy is hung like a split jury. Now my memory’s coming back clearer. I consider going one more round for the road but decide against it. Do that and he’ll be here all day. “Wanna shower or something before you go..?”

He responds by dropping to his knees and kissing my feet. “Ruth, I think we’re so terrific together.”

“Ah, sweetie.”

Am I lucky or what. Sighing, I pull close my robe and run a hand thru my slightly dishevelled mane, letting the glossy black tress fall where it may about my face. Feeling like the wanton Nazi Hanna Schmitz in that movie *The Reader*, as I go to bathe my ass with the young boy eagerly looking to crawl after me.

I bathe alone in a classical antique tub brimming with bubbles, in a bathroom filled with steam – expunging dirt, smells, blushes, any unpleasantries in general. Still a bit buzzed, I feel pretty darn good, mind you, despite commiting myself to yet again hooking up with some tool or starry-eyed groupie who’s probably convinced that an ol’ bounce in your hallowed bed will somehow make a volume of Desposyni fantasy and fortune a transmissible reality. As though he could draw infectious inspiration from *moi* or learn some magical lesson for life simply thru the penetration of my puddy yum.

That explains why the boy looked so crestfallen when I made him suit up for the swim party. No jimmyhat no kittycat is what Mlle. Ruth say. And what she say goes.

Right now, I’m tossing it up with a few dudes here and there, none of them exclusively. Some femmes hear this and turn their noses, as though I’m the down low their mums warned them about. As though I’m the bitch humping their dog husband or the honey that has him nursing a sweet tooth.

Ya know, men can screw I don’t know how many bunnies with no blowback. But when a dame do the same and get free willie with it – damn, shun, shame Miss Thang. This *mademoiselle* is no whore, just my daddy’s daughter. And besides, I’ve yet to take up some antiquated vow pledging to *amour, honneur, et égard* any damn body. Man or woman. No mofo has put a rock on my finger in this life.

Idunno. Sometime I want both everything and nothing at all.

After bathing, I emerge holding the corner of a big fluffy towel just above my teeming ta tas with one hand. Still rubbing my shampooed mane dry with a smaller towel in the other hand.

“Are we okay here.”

Find my stranger fully dressed in his wrinkled blue slacks and shirt flipped inside out, only now wandering round as though he was in a museum. Thru the hall into the old man’s office inwhich I’ve converted to my own. Careful in his handling of the *Africaina* carvings and gold desktop figurines, studying the marble and malachite as well as a French *étui* once belonging to Charles de Gaulle. Gazing over shelves of books I’ve rearranged – from old incestuous classics by the likes of Frenchwoman Anais Nin and Bostonian William Hill Brown to leatherbound manuscripts and screenplays in custom goldlead binding. All those by my *pére*, my mentor, my luver.

“I should probably be going.” The boy looks at his watch. “I have classes in a few hours.”

“Oh? Where?”

“Skidmore. . .”

He loses words. Apparently just noticing me standing here. Freshly scrubbed. Smelling like wild flowers. All but naked in a towel barely shielding my front, so seductively hanging in its own haphazard way just off the hardened tips of my breasts, its lower end trail dragging the floor as I walk him out.

Downstairs foyer we say our goodbyes. Embrace each other, him mannishly patting my fanny and me slyway patting him down.

“Don’t forget, Ruth, it’s the Blue Bay Lighthouse Bar & Grill Resort on Lakeshore.”

“Where you reside—“

“Work.”

“*Oui*, work. How can I forget. See ya, sport.”

I show him the door. Watch him go. Then I go nuts. What in God’s name is the matter with me. Perpetual planning and making decisions via my creamy little pussia is perhaps not the smartest way to conduct life. Babyfaced college tramp could have just as easily become treacherous rich babe butcher or something. I must be getting sloppy, gotta tighten up, boo boo.

“Knoc-a-bloc, boss bee!” LaQuita announces her presence by nine. “Sorry I’m late. Dang traffic on ninety’s narly this morning.”

“Hey. *Salutations* Quita. You got my message last night, right?” I come down barefoot wearing a Louie Vuitton combo.

“Got it. Took care of it right then, too.” She hands me a Starbucks cream java. “I’m not even gonna ask who you were gettin’ it poppin’ with last night.”

I can’t function a full twenty-four without my daily dose of *latté café*. LaQuita normally takes care of stuff as this. Like my errands, my shopping, my hype on teenybooper social sites, my get of the latest gossip, my marijuana supply, keeping my secrets, what lies I tell and to whom. Whatever is needed likely has LaQuita’s attention.

I hired the Michigan undergrad as a personal asssistant some three years ago and like having her around. Luv it actually. A girl of my generation and elsewise my peer. Dimpled babycakes. Those peach poppy tart lips of hers always glossy. Smooth mocha skin lavishly pierced. Lush hairdo the bomb. The Black Barbie she calls herself. LaQuita’s shot out.

“Also brought you some maple peacan doughnuts from Salley’s.” She removes her sleeveless bolero jacket which matches a heeled pair of UGG boots. “I’m dieting again.”

I chuckle. “Since when, this morning?”

“Couldn’t get the BabyPhat jeanies to fasten up over the fanny.”

Laughter.

“Quita, help me find my blue pikes.”

“You’re wearing sandals with that skirt? Thought we were supposed to head up to Toronto and scoop the cookie monster from camp?”

“Ussie wants my *mére* to come fetch him so he can stay up there for a cousin’s big birthday bash this weekend.”

“Ohh, right.” LaQuita nods with a knowing little smirk. “No way that kid’s missing cake. And me and you?”

“Figured we’d spend a little time in the Big Apple.”

She looks skeptical. “A little time, huh?”

“Few days.” I gauge her reaction.

“It’s for yo book, ain’t it?” My cherished teenage dilettante does her favorite *oh-no-you-didn’t*  expression with exaggerated worry. “Ruth, I hope to God this don’t involve us chasin’ no more hookers or chicken hawks down alleyways.”

“*Non, non*. Not this time unfortunately.” Sneaky little grin creeps up my face. “Can’t see a thing in those dark alleys.”

OCHO

Back in my native Harlem. I ride passengerside the four-door Ford Glider my partner Nick McNabb drives. In less than twenty minutes we pass any and everything. From my old grade school academy, where I had my first puppy luv crush at the annual dance and Marc Dueller looked underneath my dress, to the Apollo Theater, where notable acts like Lupe Victoria Yoli and Marvin Gaye and Jackson 5 had performed at least once. Closed and now open again.

We drive down the so-called “horrible hundreds.” Cross 106th, the street on which infamous druglord and accused sheister Leroy “Nicky” Barnes supposedly gunned down some half dozen frienemies by proxy. And 110th, which acted as a backdrop for the movie *Gangster* wherein Hollywood actor Denzel Washington played the storied Harlem kingping Frank Lucas.

“Teresa.”

Nick looks over at me. “Come again?”

“I was just thinking aloud how my mama used to work there.”

“In that office building?”

“Sure. Back when it was a hotel.” I’m a bit reminiscent. “According to mother, Fidel Castro stayed there once while visiting the Big Apple.”

“Think I remember reading a thing or two about that back when I was tryna pass PS.” Nick allows a small, begrudged smile of recollection. “Had something to do with the Civil Rights Movement in America, yes?”

“More like the Black Power resistance.”

“Big difference?”

“Huge.” I kindly nod. “And my papa hated the Cuban with a passion.”

“Why because he was a Communist dictator. . . or just plain Cuban?”

“For the Savior’s sake, no!” I have to shake my head sometimes at the sheer depth of my partner’s benign cultural idocy. “Because he supported anti-American, Puerto Rican independence leader Don Pedro Albizu Campos.”

“Oh. I get it. Because not everyone wanted independence from the states.”

“Most islanders and Nuyoricans prefer statehood or the status quo.” I’m quietly talking while checking home addresses against the one in my smartpalm. “Only the drug cartels and other Third World leftists want a Puerto Rico with no US oversee.”

On 124th, Nick slows. Whole darn street looks like a graveyard for back-dated, broke down cars from a bygone era. Old furniture. Whatever stuff residents seem to have lost real use for. Kids out playing and flipping on old dirty matresses. Couple slick-looking hoods standing round hugging the block.

Primordial police-model sedan parked in front of the corresponding address.

Nick gestures. “That’s gotta be it.”

“*Sí*, partner. Not many fire red fusty Chevrolets in Harlem World.”

We pull over opposite side the street. Just then the door of the brownstone in question comes open all of a sudden. Lone guy emerges. Colored, lean, youthful. Casual swag as he ambles down to the bright red Chevy that led us here.

“That’s our guy, lieu.”

“Looks like. Follow him, see where he goes.”

From a comfortable distance we trail the suspect a few dozen blocks north. He pulls his Chevy into the bustling lot of a fav Hip Hop watering hole.

“156th and 18th.” Nick thinks aloud while easing the wheel. “Where’s he heading. . ?”

“That’s Willie Sports Bar.” I check my gun’s chamber. “Place doubles as a shrine to Rucker Park. Let’s take him before he gets lost.”

We start to climb out just as does the suspect. He steps hiking up his pants. Glances back admirably at his whip. Sees us. Freezes. Slowly, undecidably, he begins backing up and hawkeying around with nervous hesitancy. Then abruptly he spins away and strikes out running.

“And he’s off!” Nick vaults forward like a powerful jungle cat and gives chase.

“Aw, perfect. How I shoulda wore my track shoes!”

I take off after them. After *him*, the asshole! In my feminine sculpted Jacobs jacket and slacks. Apparently looking the part as some jerkoff bystander whistles with a thing or two about *Miss Piggy* being a *hot tamale.* My bluesteel Taurus automatic held pointed skyward, hoping against hope that the *sospechar* isn’t armed. Last thing I need is some poor bastard’s family on TV crying foul.

Suspect shoots. Lets off four or five quick ones that sends my partner skidding hard and fast into a sidewalk vendor for cover.

I fire back on a dime. Sharp turn left causes the perp to drop his gun – a big gun – slowing his sprint but not stopping it. Down an alleyway.

“Nick.” I holler in passing.

“I’m okay. Go.”

And go I do. Round the block’s bend. Down 17th street. Only now I’m making tracks. Wildchild running full speed. Like Usain Bolt in a bra, or Marion Jones without the juice. And for a midthirties yoga yuppie I can still sprint a mint. Nothing worthy of a medal but surely faster than some minute street thug in baggy Rocawear jeans and ridiculously large boots. A punk that carries cannons and pops at cops and shows no genuine respect for his community or the people in it.

At the end of the block I hook another left and don’t see him. I know instantly that he’d slowed down a pace likely after no longer seeing anyone behind him. Presumedly not a lot but enough that I reach his exit a step or two before he does.

In seconds the perp comes darting out of the alley, still peering back over his shoulder.

He never sees my high flying foot. Wedge-heel oxford so swift and powerful that it stops the fleeing fool like a rubberwall in a psyche ward. Folds him like a lawnchair. The impact lifting him about a foot, seemingly holding the guy suspended for a couple seconds, then dropping his ass like a bag of Jiffy’s cake mix.

“Police, buster!” I stand over him admiring my work. “Stay down. Or things will get real ugly for you and quite fast.”

NUEVE

Jurdy Weston. We take him to OPP. Book him on charges of attempting to murder two police officers and some two dozen witnesses. An amplifying tactic that’s good for investigative pressure. Then we stuff him in an interrogation room. Let him sit alone for about half an hour worrying over his fate.

Thru a one-way glass, Nick and I stand watch from outside the room with a friendly desk sergeant and senior fed agent working the Congressman Rogers case.

“Nineteen-years of age. Trinidad Tobago native now residing in east Harlem.” The serge recites what we already know. “Supposedly with an aunt at Taft Housing out in Washington Heights but that’s not where you found him.”

Known as a total hardass around our department, Sgt. Owens is considered my devotee. Short, cubby and charming, he’s one of those guys that goes out of his way for women in the workplace. And not in some pitiful attempt to get laid either. Nick and ‘nem like to joke saying that it’s because he’s in “chick cuffs” and used to being “spanked” by his wife. Yet Nick and the other knuckleheads are all single, last time I checked. And of course, they’d never even dare taunt Owens to his face.

“Kid has a rapsheet too long for rules.” Agent Randy Taylor’s assessments are sober-sounding. The cerebal Chicagoan appearing no less excited to be apart of the biggest investigation since the last thing to go kaboom! “I should probably wake some people up for this one.”

Owens shows me his skepticism. “Boy doesn’t look like he’d have any personal dealings or grudges with a sitting congressman, you think?”

“Gee whiz, ya reckon?” Nick seems to let the snide remark slide out the side of his mouth. His torn buttonup removed but for his undershirt and gun holster. Still holding an Icy Hot pack against his right thigh. “This is our guy’s guy more than likely, Sherlock Homebody. I’m sure of it.”

Owens cuts a glaring eye at him.

“Zip it, Nick,” I say. “You and Agent Taylor should let me do the talking.”

The three of us enter the interrogation room.

Jurdy Weston raises his head. Jumps up.

“Sit down.”

Falls back in his chair.

I take my seat at the table. Place a closed folder atop it for dramatic effect. Nick and the fed quietly find a place on either side of the room.

“*Bueno dias.* Maybe not so good day for you, huh, Jurdy? My name’s Charlyne Gomez. Lieutenant with NYPD. Homicide unit. The lanky guy to my left in the sharp off-the-rack suit is FBI Agent Randy Taylor. The one to my right with the bruised knee and attitude on his face is Detective Nicolas McNabb. I call him Nick. You can’t call him that.” Fake split second smile. “Now, anything you’d like to tell us?”

“Tell ya how to get to hell *if* I thought you were brave enough to shell ya self, you Taco Bell grunday-looking bitch.” He sneers a chuckle. “Fuck you, boy bum-knee and Mr. Clip-on-tie.”

“Oh. Okay. You got jokes.” I nod. Calmly gather up the folder as if finishing. “Tell you what. We’ll see who’s laughing once that chromatology report comes back saying that the bomb residue found on your car matches the explosive dye from our crime scene. Hope you liked being a terrorist.”

“Hold up, hold up! Fuck you mean bomb dew on my short. I ain’t Arab, bitch.”

“Precisely what I told Mr. Clip-on there. But we all know how the federal government operates. Always profiling.” Casually I stand. “I’m sure the real subversives were just using you, which is the only reason you fired on cops.”

“Nah, son, I shot because I thought you were from Sammy’s and them motorcycle sonsabitches I creamed out at Pool 30.” Jurdy stares from one badge to another. Trace of genuine concern starting to show in his ebony eye. “But I ‘on’t know scratch about any bombing or terrorism noise you making now. That’s on the real.”

“FBI has a list.” Agent Taylor waves a thin folder of his own.

“Money, I wouldn’t give a fuck if you had tablets brought down from a Burning Bush. If I’m on it for some crazy Taliban shit then it’s faulty, plain and simple.” He leans back and crosses his arms with a sorta stubborn conviction. “No other way to square it but to stress that I don’t know any ooh wee mothafuckas that the average Harlemite don’t know.”

“But the cab, Jurdy.” I come on with the come on right here. “Your pretty fire red Chevy was seen running over an onlooker’s dog in Lower Manhattan last week for sure. Now you may not have anything to do with what’s going on in some Central Asian country, but you know you hit that pooch.”

Actually the bright-colored Chevrolet, registered to one Jurdy Weston, had been citated twice for illegal usage of handicap zoning at a parking deck on Seventh Avenue days earlier. We traced him thru the citation.

“All this for a fucking barking dog. Really? No wonder the city crying broke.” Jurdy shakes his head in disgust. “Anyhow, couldn’t’ve been me that mowwed the mut down because Gina had my ride. . .”

“Your lady?”

“If we’re from Kentucky or West Virginia, sure. Why not.” Disgusted chuckles now. “Here in modern America though, Gina’s big sis.”

“And why would she be driving your car, Jurdy?” I lean in over the table to stare him down. “Unless you’re lying to me.”

“Fuck reason would I lie.” He cops offense. “She wanted my car because she had a date. Say she didn’t want her dude seeing her behind the wheel of a showroom Beemer, pegging her as some mill ticket waiting to be punched, nah mean?! You know how you bitches play broke on one when it’s beneficial.” He laughs at the notion.

Despite myself, I smile with understanding. “And if I call your sister she’ll verify the fact that you weren’t out hitting dogs just to see how cool it’d be or talking about making bombs to mail to all your old teachers?”

“Shit yeah she will.”

“What’s Gina’s government?”

“Regina Mae Weston. Call her. Fav five in my phone.”

The name Regina Weston was on neither the employees’ nor guests’ list at Hotel Gansevoort the night of the killings.

But she *was* there.

DIEZ

A comfortable cool coats the night in Chelsea, the wildchild of Manhattan. An electric naughtiness close to palpable in the boundless party district.

In one of two dark Ford SUVs parked beneath an expired streetlamp, I sit front passenger alongside Special Agent Christopher Mass. Bug in my ear. Bored out of my mind awaiting word from an additional surveillance team.

Bit of shifting around in the backseat. Agent Taylor’s restless. Ready to test out his new toy. Some sorta techno gadget that identifies human data in real-time but also under dark. Supposedly. I’ve heard too many stories about the feds contracting out a fortune for pie-in-the-sky creations that don’t produce.

“What the hell are we doing here in booty-fruity-happy-gayland?” Nick murmurs.

“Patience, gentlemen.” Yet Chris Mass himself is growing edgy as well. The droopy-eyed New Yorker one hard-learned veteran in a battle-tested bureau. “You know the saying, good things come to those lawbirds who wait long and keep watch.”

“I never heard that.”

“You just did, son.”

Quietly I try and busy myself. Briefly answer a text or two. One from my *hija* Calisia. Informing me that she still intends to bring her Julian home for me to meet, wondering what’s with Mitch’s attitude and promising to call again. Another is from a soror – *oo oop!* – letting me in on some drama to do with a younger Delta that went to Bernard Baruch with us. A mess!

I then find an automatic link to a feed I put out earlier on my new friend Chad W Freeman. It’s an online dating profile. Hmm. I check it out:

Passionate, humble, and often headstrong doer and dramatist seeks siren for secret luv affair, family of faith, and occasional illicit intrigue. Tha dame dat’s ever so game must prove lively and able to laugh at herself and life. She should be of high intelligence, though not necessarily so intellectual, nor as a matter of course formally schooled. But spunk, class, strength and ass are all pluses. Hit me if u git me.

Blushingly I smirk. Must admit I’m actually digging the kid. And at a time when Mitch is digging his own grave. Constant work work and withdrawal at home. While the dutiful ruggish hippie thug’s the sorta act that plucks at the she-strings. Either that or I’m getting desperate.

In all candor, I’m never totally sure what I want in a man though. I do know I like a *hombre* who’s observant but not overbearing. Merciful instead of malevolent. Grateful and accommodating as oppose to an a-hole or ass kisser. I wanna guy to be driven but not a labor horse. A machoman or hunk yet not one so hot on himself that he’s prettier than me or I have to do battle with him for the mirror. *Bondad* me o’ my, maybe I know all to well what I’m hoping and hunting for in a *hombre.* The real question, more than likely, is does such dream dude exist? Not like I’m asking for Brad Pitt in his prime, or the fine Terence Howard in his hey.

“Showtime people.” Agent Mass calls for attention, straightens up himself behind the steering wheel. “Two black Benzes spotted heading directly towards us about a block out.”

“Okay. . . that’s them right there.”

“Got ‘em.”

Quietly we watch as a pair luxurious sedans cruise pass, within mere inches of our SUV, and, about ten rods up the slightly congested road, comes to a stop in front of a massive, almost somber warehouse facade, which is set back quite a distance from the curbside.

Out of the first Maybach climbs a couple goons. Dark suits. Muscular. Hispanic origin. None of us recognize either *hombre* off bat. Then out comes a female half cloaked in Chloe.

“There goes our girl.”

Regina Weston in all her wassail. It had taken us only a day to track her. Because of the high-profile nature of the case, the FBI threw its weight around in the warrantless wire-tapping process while we at OPP put Jurdy Weston under 72-hour isolated restraint. Actions which all but assures Regina Weston’s unawares.

Then the most wanted unknown *mujer* in New York City casually ambles over to the second Maybach as if without a care in the world. She opens the rear door.

From this particular vehicle steps another goon type. This one boyish in the face, biracial, barrel-chested, good-looking but in a sinister manner. The way he so calmly gaze round in inquity.

“That’s Pedro Soriano.” Agent Mass nods knowingly. “A Dominican demon if there ever were one. Promising Little Leaguer in another life on the Hispaniola till he was accused of bashing a crooked coach’s head in with a baseball bat. Been a bloody nightmare in the American underworld decades since.”

“Wonder what he has to do with our case.”

After Pedro, a second man emerges talking on a cellphone. This one with a beige complexion and bushy head of nappy-looking black curls. Leaner, little taller with a confident aura proving difficult to understate in what I know to be a black Brioni. His evidently custom-made.

“This guy is clearly in charge.” I can spot an Alpha male from a mile away.

“Well, I’ll be damned.” Awesome recognition pretty apparent in Agent Mass’ eye. “If it isn’t the notorious Ri Ri himself. I should’ve suspected as much.” He gets on his radio cell.

“Son of a bitch.” Agent Taylor’s agitated expression confirms all. He focuses his gadget on the subject. The *new* subject. “That’s Rico Rivera alright!”

“Which changes everything.”

I listen to Feds’ back and forth, lost. “Who in the world is Rico Rivera?”

ONCE

Rico Rivera has the Gotham City of New York in a KungFu chokehold, and he damn well knows it. How many street chieftains singlehandedly controls almost an entire segment of the Big Apple black market, but also holds a Gargantuan grip on countless concerns of great importance, from the East Coast distribution of poultry to construction? How many other made men of his age and stature are known – or not known, if you like – for being a banker’s bookmaker or shylock’s shylock, among other things? What *Cubano* besides Rico can honestly say he works the dirty white collars clean while claiming palpable clout on Wall Street? That he directs the Dominicans in Washington Heights? Or incorporated the Indians in Jackson Heights? Silenced the endangered Italians in Bensonhurst? Commands absolute respect from the Russians of Brighton Beach even while openly attempting to drive them into the sea?

Ri Ri stands tall in a league of his own.

Like much of his family, Rico Rivera grew up on the dirt streets of Maria De Jesús, undeniably one of Havana’s poorest slums. Throughout his rough childhood Rico had known only the food shortages, collapsing housing and other problems that followed the demise of the Soviet Union, Cuba’s communist sugar daddy, as well as the endless tightening of the US trade embargo.

Rico hardly knew his papa, a black *guajiro* who was stabbed to death in a gaming barn over a cock fighting dispute. His papa’s old man, one of several childsoldiers to roll into Havana with leader Fidel, Raúl, Ché and their bearded band of rebels, is to this day considered a national hero. An honor later bestowwed after the Leader Comrade sent him to faraway Africa, along with some 50,000 other AfroCubans, to proudly fight and gladly die alongside that continent’s socialist freedom fighters and revolutionaries. *Victory or Martyrdom!* From the Congolese Lumumba and Libya’s Qaddafi and guerrillas in tiny Guinea-Bissau to Angola’s MPLA and The Frelimo in Mozambique and Mandela’s ANC in South Africa.

For one of these men, movements or like, in some unspecified African country, first-ranking *soldado* Chodo Rivera died an honorable death. While back home in Havana, young grandson Rico Rivera was literally no more the well off for it than any among the dirt poor, disadvantaged black majority that has always made up the Cuban population.

Only middle and upper-class white minorites, along with particular mestizos, ever regurlarly escape to America. Where many pass for Anglo, receive free state tuition, federal grant money, become senator or congress person.

The young boy Rico, meanwhile, followed his mama into prostitution, mainly sleeping with tourists, both male as well as female, often ripping them off for money or valuables.

At the tender age of eleven, Rico took a jagged steak knife thru the throat of a crooked commie party official who, in ex-change for willing sodomy, reneged on a promise to issue he and his mother *white cards* – which allow Cubans legal travel out of the country. For this he was thrown into a dungeon.

By the mid-nineties, one crisis affter another. The small island seemed overtaken with lawlessness and desperation. Leader Fidel went live on state TV and urged everyone who wished to flee to do so at once. And for the third time he threw open some prisonholes. Rico was one of the lucky ones.

A man not yet fourteen, lost to the inevitable wrongs of life for a mama or family, the excon nicknamed Ri Ri followed some 35,000 Cubans of all shades and stripes in mass exodus off the island. Setting out across the straits of the South Atlantic in a makeshift rafter made up of bundled inner tubes, old tires and rickety furniture wood. His fate in nature’s indifferent hands.

Because the Clinton Administration disagreed with Leader Fidel’s “special period” policy, those caught by US Coast Guards were refused entry by the US Government, and, since Cuban authorities would not allow their return, the captured were taken to Guantanamo Bay, where makeshift camps were setup.

Within days of setting off, young Rico landed on North American soil. And immediately both plans A and B could be summed up in three or four words: work, hustle, get it. He knew the business. Piss poor Cuban immigrant who’d made a mad dash for his dreams and destiny in the so-called land of the free was still a piss poor Cuban.

Many understandably saw his kind as illegal, second-class citizen, or just not at all. Thus he picked, stole and sold flowers on Key West – the largest, more touristy, most developed of The Florida Keys chain of islands – and hustled his way night and day up that northwest curve of pristine nature and convenience removed from contemporary culture which appeared popular with second-home owners.

On bankable clustered islands in two of the three Upper Keys neighborhoods, fish is king and so for Rico small commercial schemes were the theme. Yet the real money, to him anyway, was to be found in Key Largo, an island community many Floridians look at in the same way Bostonians see Cape Cod.

Domestic help, resort hands, bus boys and the like thrived. Rico didn’t care for it, *de ninguna manera.* Yet to paraphase a theoretician whose name he couldn’t remember but read repeatedly during those days in the dungeon: to take as gospel that your personal view of life is the only true breath of existence, well then that’s the death act of circus decisions.

“When in Rome. . .”

Young Rico apple-polished the affluent around The Ocean Reef Club of Key Largo like a thankful slave, while endlessly plotting and scheming on many and their much. During the winter he secretly lived in a Minnesotan snowbird’s oceanfront condo, borrowed the man’s boat and quickly learned how to fishdive for dope. In two months coming up with five sizable packs among God knows how many, all poorly disguised by some faceless Caribbean criminal looking for a more cost-effective and innovative way to float shit loads of coke product onto Florida shores.

By Christmas Rico was riding around Miami on a motoscooter, masterfully playing his role. The young delivery boy of an imaginary middleman who worked for the make-believe kingpin down in The Keys.

The easily likable delivery boy that never once failed to show luv to the petty hustlahs in the rough-n-tumble Liberty City whenever he made a drop there. The delivery boy that convinced his storied boss to front packs to a slew of juvenile delinquents doing nothing worth anything in Allapattah, the so-called produce district off in the seedy section of Miami which tourists never see. The same delivery boy who passed along boss’ orders to kill that one because he didn’t pay up, or another because sources said he was talking too much.

At the same time Rico was developing his own reputation for ruthlessness. Young likable delivery boy becoming dangerous middleman almost overnight. He ate with animals, both foreign and domestic. Somehow maintained a fair notion of neutrality while breaking bread with rival street factions. Even then, the *AfroCubano* had a special quality that allowed him to pour it up with vicious posse types like John Does and Bank Dawgs, and then roam among the lawful on Lincoln Road. Cruise down Collins Ave with no nonsense on scope. Lay with topless college bitches looking to blow something on Fourth Street or the LPP Beach. Peddle opium to party-hard fratboys at Opium. Dine on classic dishes with older dames at some sidewalk cafe along Espanola Way. Hit Alton or South Pointe flossing gloss won from major bets on the Dolphins.

The owner of tantalizing rugged looks, Rico Rivera possessed a rather disarming manner inwhich he was able to market. Natural gifts of survival con and Caribbean charm he capitalized on.

Proficient in social abilities and personal attributes not normally ascribed to the *gruncho*, a derogatory term used by uppity Hispanics as well as non-Spanish-speaking Latinos to peg their poorer peers from a lower social class. A word equivalent to *nigger*. Not a stretch to say that Rico got it twice as bad coming up in Havana.

But Rico as a young man was rewriting his lifestory in realtime. By his twenties, both hoodoo treacherous as well as truth in a bottle. He imported the deadly loyal Dominican Pedro Soriano from Tampa troubles. Made power moves from Brownsville to Baton Rouge. Corpus Christi to Chihuahua. Built smuggling pipelines from Nogales to Tucson to Santa Fé while contracting out profitable wet work to nasty brown bastards from 18th street in Los Angeles to the Bulldogs ruling Fresno, Killa Cali.

Midway the new Millennium, *el AfroCubano* Rico Rivera migrated to New York City, accompanied by an extensive Latin lineage of thoroughbred lieutenants and loyalists, both legitimate and otherewise. No secret that his viciousness was matched only by his repute among firebreathers in the field, the bulk of which spanned the I-95 corridor, from Soho to Sobe. Thus no surprise he was declared biggest toad in the puddle, enthroned Chairman and Supreme Crown of the Almighty Latin Kings Nation – America’s oldest, largest Hispano, Latino street syndicate – surpassing even childhood Havana playground legend and now deposed New York ALKN regional founder Luis “King Blood” Felipé himself.

Ri Ri’s arrival meant Coming of The Kingdom.

DOCE

Aside from luxurious vehicles coming and going, not a single clue suggests that one of the hottest, most illicit galas the globe round is currenting underway within such dreary walls of the Chelsea warehouse.

Inside, Rico Rivera and his small entourage ambles slowly and casually down into the bowels of the place. Beneath the dark, musical atmosphere. Pass punk-beautiful menial *púas* standing as observant statues. Smelling like money, gunpowder and cologne.

Alluring attendants approaches them completely nude except for fake diamond dogcollars and cum-on-me pumps. Offers them drinks from a tray. Youthful faces. Perfect bodies well-oiled. Muscles rippling with the work effort. Hair just dancing as they carry on. The jiggling, prancing motions of the females in startling contrast to the tightening, flux movements of the males.

Many the maidens know mighty hard nipples without a string of pubic hair – shaven symbol of a smooth, wicked ideal, the perpetual child – and not a single chap in sight who isn’t fully, humiliatingly erect.

“Whatta waste of resources these things can be.”

Seemingly out of nowhere a slender European model in bizzare vogue attire appears. Without a word takes Mr. Rivera by the arm. Escorts him up to his box with but Pedro in tow.

Resembling a sort of makeshift theater or opera house, the patrons area is impressively structured in fine dining fashion. Each section its own cocoon, allowing for privacy, total anonymity from other club members, yet unobstructive view of the large stage with its drawn curtains.

“Fine people of Babylonia!” Rico enters the private box to find it already buzzing with associates. “I bring you glad tidings from the gods.”

“Ri! Just in time!” Jorja Garcia sings his praise. Half drunk yet soberly enjoying the private engagement of six, the ravishingly superior nymph sets an open bottle of Merlot down next to her barely touched Spanish beef Wellington and pushes herself up from the table in a sexy sapphire-blue dress. They kiss cheeks in greeting. “My chief knight in gunman’s armor if ever I need saving. Everyone say hello to Ri Ri. Geez!”

Mannered laughter. The intimate grouping stops gossiping betwixt themselves to happily acknowledge everyone’s favorite enfant terrible. One not spun out of traditional family wealth and societal privilege, and so, of course, neither the gringos nor the white Latinos ever let him forget it.

“Rico my friend.”

“Klaudia Doran. Fair lady of the east. And Viktor, sport of the hour. Saw the game the other day.”

“The redcard dust-up with the ref?”

“Entertainment, my good fella.” Rico pats him on the shoulder. “You won, good job.”

Amusing aristocratic women of a certain age with their rotating escorts are such a common occurrence at these hidden events. This one a remarkably sexy ball club owner – bald, bristling eyebrows, dimpled square face and Slavic accent. Hear his club’s a moneypit.

“Rico, *amigo*.” Ruben Xavier smirks goodnaturely across the table as the Cuban takes a seat. “I see you’re handling business tonight.”

“Me?” Rico laughs, casually undoing the solid gold buttons of his jacket and tucking his silky napkin. “All I have to do is keep the peace in paradise. You’re the huncho with your hands full.”

The silver-templed titan bellys back in hapless hilarity. Tan, crescent-eyed beam bursting with mild dismissal, as he sits there betwixt both his longtime wife and his personal nurse who doubles as secret mistress. An unspoken practice among traditional Latin family men, although Ruben’s tenable little arrangement is ballsy nonetheless. His carnal acquaintance with the hot dirty blonde particularly striking when he turns and starts lecturing the appropiately clad broad about something or another. His gravel voice low and somewhat besotted.

Yet *Señora* Sarah Elisa Xavier reigns witty, rich and above it all. The courtly clothing designer and femme cofounder of *Encanto Niña* quietly sipping tang champagne while sitting in an exaggerated pose of boredom. Silky gorgeous red hair, charming catsy eyes the color of sparkling raw emerald, vampish face with luscious Cupid’s bow lips.

Apparently wanting to seem inclusive, she leans forward on her elbows in breastastic fashion. An absolute stunning figure just barely covered in a silky red evening gown so fine and so smooth that it appears to run down the curves of her statuesque frame like water.

Briefly, discreetly, Rico tilts his half-empty glass, silently acknowledging the strapless allure of those big golden titties, so full and heavy against the gauzy thin fabric that nippo shadows appear in dark.

“*Mi cubanita*.” Rico winks at her. Then glances back at his escort. “If it’s true that we are what we eat, I’ll have what she’s having. The beautiful redhead there.” He then tastes one of her sliced fruit desserts, pops a chocolate truffle in his mouth.

“That’s an aphrodisiac, you know?”

“My dick’s hard already.” He pulls a JC Newman from inside his jacket. Majestic cigar made in Tampa by hand. Light up without concern. “Speaking of things being stiff, I’ll have another drink. Something stronger. A black vodka.”

Ruben is slow to grin. “I bet you will, you naughty boy you.”

“So tell me something, Klaudia, what do you Europeans and your men think of body hair?” Jorja gets pretty blasé and talkative when she’s tipsy. “Or perhaps I should be asking you Viktor.”

“Body hair?” The bald man looks blank.

“*Si deportista*. I’ve been toying with the idea of doing like you and just going bald.”

“You’re thinking of cutting off all your hair? No way!”

Hauntingly, Klaudia giggles at the Slav’s stupidity. “She is speaking pubic hair, Vik *buni*.”

“Cute but clueless.” Jorja purrs sweetly in her mocking. “Anyhoo, the nookie’s speaking a fine line of Portuguese tonight. Yet Brazilian’s not necessarily the best flava for a monkey like mine.”

“Child, you’re kidding, surely. I say pubic hair never goes out of style. It keeps coming back like the American cinema slasher Jason.” Klaudia sips her wine. “Woman you’ve just about finished that Merlot all by your lonesome.”

“Tonight’s a celebration.” The gorgeous Guatemalan runs a hand thru a mop of dark café noir curls. Smiles like a whore on top of the world. “I declare this date a holiday. Here on it shall by known as Garcia’s. Glasses up. Come on. A toast, to Garcia’s.”

“To Garcia’s!” Jolly laughter.

A naked menial *mujer* brings Rico a more-than-impressive dish of soulful Bahamian and Creole *origen* classics, which includes crab Creole and *queue boeuf* and a siding the Cuban doesn’t immediatly recognize.

“Have any of you gals ever been to a photo shoot?” Jorja’s on a roll. “Well, apparently the cameras luv me and I them.”

“Yeah, call us when you’re on the cover. Few months ago *People en Español* dubbed Sarah there the ‘Latin Monroe face of fashion’. Monroe as in Marilyn, luv.”

Annoyed all of a sudden, Jorja turns on the help. “Why hasn’t the show started yet? What the hell is the hold up, hon? Tell them to get this *pelicula* rolling now!”

Lights on the stage. From behind either end of the curtain comes a parade of naked young beauties in what has been billed as the *Night of Nations*. Heavenly whores secretly housed in the dreamscapes of mankind. Carefully gathered from the world over, richer than any visual imaginings or pornographic illustrations. Angelic Arab faces, red-dot Indian Kamadeva, Nubian beauties, fully freckled white Aussie asses, slutty Italian nuns in silver rosaries and crosses, African queens in face-paint, skinny Frenchies, Scandinivian Viking blondes with golden limbs, Japanese juices, Asiatic yellow yummies, West Indie slave girls, Canadie snowbunnies, Harems of unwanted Chinese flowers, grand British bitches, Americancan coochies, sultry islanders of the Pacific, hot Amazonians with twinkling jewels over their right eyes or in their left nostrils, luvely *houris* and cunts without a country.

All on a single stage, dancing and harmonizing and shaking and beating and making a sort of exotic, blue musical in titillating togetherness.

Then almost abruptly the stage clears, taking all the oxygen with it. Along with the others in their box, Rico and Jorja and Sarah all quietly watch while occasionally looking over at one another.

The stage curtains, which had acted as a simple backdrop for the musical, are slowly and dramatically opened. Reveals a spectacular forestland. With dirt paths flanked by trees and bushes and hanging gardens and a tiny pool for a pond. Large boulder rock next to a partial house front. Real dog chained up. Bird music and waterfall sounds. Now nerve-rackingly dark.

Suddenly a girl appears. A Little Red Riding Hood look-a-like with pigtails but bare-ass beneath a teeny tiny skirt and sexy laced stockings. An armed pair of big lumberjacks chases her down. Rips her flimsy little clothing off. Take turns raping her while she moans and cries and begs in what sounds like Norwegian.

Bear and lion roars grow louder while Little Red Riding Hood is getting gangbanged. About a dozen others creepingly appear on all fours, their naked bodies finely painted as dark-colored grizzlies and golden lions and striped tigers.

Several bears and cats attack each other. The two lumberjacks pull hard dicks out of Red Riding Hood’s ass and mouth, then just happen to produce a cowboy robe which they use to loop and tie down a naked body of a female tiger, who’s at once thrashing and growling and twisting and turning and playing in her own pussy till she skeets.

Other tigers leap onto the lumberjacks, climb atop them, fuck their faces, lick their balls, suck them good and dry, which kills them.

Naked Little Red Riding Hood attempts to back away and sneak off when a deformed-looking crocodile springs from the half-a-foot high pond and snatches her into the muddy black. Fucks her to death. Or at least until a split appears in the side of the tiny kiddie pool.

At last a man lion and papa bear comes out from either side of the large boulder, forces their pride and sloth to fuck and makeup for the sake of forest peace. And after a great big animal orgy, of growling, fucking, sucking, biting, scratching, slapping, pinning, pissing and spewing, every creature in the land rejoice.

Theatrical depravity and fetish which on this one night creates a sphere of magic in club members that must be put to test on shiny subjects.

TRECE

“We should be going now, Ruben.”

Several avert their liquored up and lusty gaze, embarrased for Sarah.

“*Señora*, if you’re tired, sweetheart, why don’t you have the driver take you home.” Ruben’s loosened up damn plenty since the first act, his arm now so carelessly wrapped about his nurse’s waist. “You take the car. Nicole and I will sit awhile longer and hitch a ride with Jorja.”

The redhead beauty looks at her husband, shocked. A sudden welling in her catsy eyes glistening like the long-sweeping Harry Winston earrings she’s wearing with the pearline diamond Van Cleef & Arpels necklace complimenting her cleavage. She lurches out of her chair and out of the private box.

Ruben ignores it all. “Hey, Pedro, how about having a menial fetch us more wine, *amigo*, or a nice cognac?”

“Don’t hold your breath.” Pedro ignores him.

“Ruben, Ruben, Ruben babe.” Jorja’s wasted. “Go on after upset wifey and make it better, Rube.”

“Have one go after more drinks is what I’ll do.”

“Not necessary.” Casuallly wiping his mouth with his napkin, Rico balls up the silky cloth and tables it before getting to his feet. “I’ll handle it.”

“Aw, Rico *gracias*. Thank you.” Ruben happily hails him holy. “You see, this is why we all just luv you so. Because you fix things. Make life more easy to bear. Make my life, him life, her life, yo life, ho life. Ha ha! Right madam Jorja?”

“Yeyy!”

Rico leaves. Cooly digs for his smartphone. Briefly and unwittingly takes out a diamond ball that he always keeps pocket. Sorta poor man’s insurance policy.

Invisible goon on point texts him Sarah’s whereabouts.

He finds her up on the roof of the warehouse. Sitting on a brick parapet with her legs crossed. Looking out at nothing Manhattan while smoking a cigarette.

“You don’t even look right smoking that thing.” He stands relaxed alongside her with his hands in his pants pocket.

“*Muchacho*, who’re you telling. I know, right? This one I bummed off a burlesque babe,” she confesses as he takes the cig from her long, silver-tipped fingers, puffs it once then thumbs it away. “It’s just that drunk Ruben can be so depressing.”

“Really *Señora* Sarah? I don’t know. I find sober Ruben to be a pain in the ass.”

She smiles. Makes another sour face. “Then there’s that Nicole. Always finding problems with his health that needs nursing. Hiding behind that uniform is what she’s doing. Tell me, Rico, how young is too young?”

“For a man? Any hole’s the goal.”

“Wow! That could really take the starch out of a woman my age.”

“Luv is often a crown of thorns.”

“That’s true actually.” She glances up at him. “Though surely you known’t a thing at all about such.”

“On the contrary *mi Cubanita*. We both know I do.”

Gently Rico takes her by the hands, and stands the surprised woman to her feet. He then hugs her like a man certain. Wrapping powerful arms round that hour-glass frame. Protective cheek-gaze kisses exchange. Antihero holding the luvely dame close. By sheer will making her murmur his name most.

“Rico. What in Heaven’s name are you doing?”

“Aiding and abiding a marriage.”

Nice and tenderly the street chieftain squeezes and palms and wrings to feel how far her forties has brought with them voluptuousness. Five inches to her height are added on by leatherstring Helen-of-Troy heels. Her long mane swept up and classically coiffed to further enhance the model illusion of tallness.

“Rico. . . your hands are all over my butt.”

“And if it were anyone else’s I’d be asking you is it real.”

“Someone’s been reading too much *Tunotas*.”

According to the tabloid, Sarach Elisa Xavier’s butt is among the most bootyfull yet suspect in the history of pop culture America, alongside the likes of athletes and TV personalities and musicians, such as tennis champ Serena Williams and beach volleyball babe Misty May and reality TV whore Kim Kardashian and hip hopstress Nicki Minaj and actress Jennifer Lopez – *before* motherhood, strangely enough.

“You’re wearing nothing but goosebumps underneath this gown.” Rico kisses her with barely controlled hunger. “One strong wind would share your natural beauty with all the night.”

She breaks free her lips, turning her mouth away. “Rico, I’m a little bit beside myself right now. I don’t know what’s gotten into me.”

“I know what’s aching and waiting to get in. Feel it throbbing? You remind me of Vanessa Del Rio but refined.”

“Rico?! Comparing a *mujer* to a vintage pornstar isn’t exactly adulating.”

“Marry me Sarah.”

“What?”

“Join with me in a *mistico* rite of *Troth-e-Tie*.”

“Ah, *bondad dolor*, Rico!” She melts in dissipation. Her luvely face so exquisite in bone and shadow. Dazzling green eyes beholding him with the faintest touch of shock and innocence and wonder. “ I cannot marry you, *querido*, and you know that. Although I wouldn’t mind a Santeria ceremony the second time around. However, that’s not the point. I’d never get away with such illicit act.”

“But we would, *miel*.”

“How, by running away together to Seychelles or Saint Lucia or some place?”

He smiles lopsidedly. “Run? Why I *run* New York. The muscle of the town. Guardian of Empire’s Crown. They should build a statue of me! I want you.”

Warming, Sarah shakes her head. “Astounding. You smitten by me. And your self-confidence is overwhelming, I must say. Never met a young man so assured of his own ominous propensity. Wonder what all your family and friends would think if they knew you were propositioning me.”

“*Bebé*, you can’t blackmail the black male.” He fingers a single loose lock of hair from side her face. “You’re hot all over because you know you want this. *Need* this. Some measure of satisfaction to your pent-up frustrations and starter-wife passions. Jorja shaves down there. Do you?”

“I’m an older gal. Downy natural’s nice and comfy.”

“I’ll bet the burning bush is drenched. Go head, touch it.”

Eye to eye stares amid sure hush and heavy breathing. Sarah is stunned, to be sure, but up here on the rooftop of an illicit members-only club at night exists something powerful about the situation, urged on or allowed by the fine wine she drank, all of which prevents her from stopping.

Rico is on a hole hunt, more or less, while Sarah hunts to hold on.

His hand couples with hers twixt her legs, cupping and pressing against hot crotch thru the evening gown. How he peels the shoulderless top down about the armpits. Big milky bronze titties teeming free. Chocolate spread aureole nipples threatening to explode in the cool air.

Sucking faces while grinding, they fall back up against the brickside inlet. More force than foreplay. Ri RI more gangsta than gentleman. Sarah more salacious than sure. Affaire de couer isn’t necessarily an unexplored concept to the married *Cubana* pussycat, just its renewal more recent.

Caught up in subconscious arousal, she dips a hand to unzip him. Not certain why. Yet assessing his sex and its size does appear to be summoning her to action. And he’s something. So hard. Nice and loggish, with gravity, and girth. Rico notices her breathlessness, those gorgeous green eyes bubbling. *Apurado*. His chest no doubt swelling as the dame paws on his meat while mentally debating devour.

“Nice piece.”

“No complaints thus far.”

“Still Rico. Not entirely sure if I should.”

“Don’t make it beautiful rape, *mi Cubanita*.”

Flirtatiously Sarah frowns, eyes him with seductive caution. Acknowledges the domesticated animal in the face of the virile *AfroCubano*, whose rising temptation reinforce itself against her belly like a soldier planting his flag in battle.

Then, in a hot flash, a hushed flurry of carnal activity. . . Rico pulling up her sleeky gown. Throwing open her legs. Stretching aside tiny silky string thong *pantias*. Pushing up inside her from the snoot to the root. And leant there against the granule brickwall they fuck like ferrets. Clumsy, purposeful, precarious.

“Oha. Ooh. *Encantado bestia!*. . . brio. *Exeberancia vital*.” The redhead’s a beautiful mess. “*Para siempre. . . gracia!*”

Kissing, sucking tongue, biting.

Pulling, pinning, banging, smacking, scratching.

Then, amid spans of single-minded fucking, him doggedly humping her back against the brick, her turning them and humping him with femme maturity, Sarah begs off, him out, and competently finishes him with her soft hands. Be the act scandalous or plain humiliating, the respectable clothing designer is suddenly feeling more than just naughty. Overcome by a great big erotic notion of nasty. Feeling a real dirty girl spirit. And thus she doesn’t attempt to avoid the *AfroCubano*’s juicy resolution as he spurts out all over her evening gown.

“*Mi, si. . . el vino blanco.”* Moaning Ri Ri watches cloudy-eyed the wayward spray of his jism. “*Y la más hermosa. . !”*

He lavish the statuesque socialite in exquisite costume with luv like thick white wine. Cream the classic beauty not much but enough to symbolically establish his mannish authority. Marking his territory, so to speak!

Afterwards, Rico is phoned with a message from an unknown affiliate in some field of law enforcement. Circumspect eagle eye. He must leave at the moment yet he is very gallant in departure. At last referring to Lady Sarah as a feast for the eyes of starving spirits.

Once alone, the seeping *señora* quickly finishes herself off, his sticky cum still coating her hand as she fingers herself. Flute-playing. Making clit compositions of her own.

Back down at the private box Klaudia Doran meets Sarah Elisa Xavier’s return, in good whispering girlfriend fashion shares with her the details of hubby Ruben’s bad behaviour in her absence blow-by-blow, then at some point betwixt the yakking the European blue-blood points out something on the redhead’s stunning gown. A stain. Klaudia suggests it may be an accidental spill caused by a menial who couldn’t hold a glass of water even if it was up inside him. The dear woman escorts Sarah to the private restrooms to wipe clean while attempting to guess precisely the dish from which the spots could have come. Sarah is too disgusted with herself to discuss her dress.

Unprincipled Fucking.

An old language she’s newly learning. A new chancy indulgence impends from hades’ gates to row mother earth.

Be that as it may, the somewhat speechless and excellently terrified Sarah Xavier el Cuban is smart, witty, untouchable, victorious.

Within the hour she’s gone, leaves before her husband.

Jorja Garcia parts with a private bunch for a small, ultra secret party.

While from shadows, Ri Ri, the *AfroCubano* ruler of the Latin Kings Nation, ever so quietly watches the watchers from gov’t abbreviations. Them alphabet boys!

There goes the neighborhood.

CATORCE

Around noontime, Manhattan’s Lower East Side and Soho is noticeably light with foot and car traffic. Slouchy-looking fella loosely donning a burgundy-linen business suit stands out front a tech store. On a phone. Heated conversation.

Couple doors down, hip-looking street hood steps out of Union. Skyblue Smart Set Athletic Club ball cap, powder blue sheared beaver quadex fur jacket over matching jersey, twin platinum & gold Jesus pieces on stupid long studded chain with matching Ice Tek watch and pinky ring, two-toned Azzure jeans – seemingly nary other than one of the countless rap clowns worming round the Big Apple.

Only Zee Zee is no hip hop celeb. Nothing more than a trigger-happy hooligan from Fort Greene, infact. A projects posterchild of the sorta die-fly gutter boy in the hire of BK’s despicable Big Baby, who, coincidentally, fashions himself as the featured-guestspot-rapper-that-doesn’t-really-wanna-rap. You know the type, big, fat, black with a BiggieSmalls quote always ready to go.

Zee Zee fires up a Newport. Throws a sneering gaze over at the guy arguing on his celly, all loud and emotional with nada care who knows it.

Moments later the major bootlegger Big Baby at last comes slowly wobbling out the glassdoor of the retail shop. Fur brimhat, red tinted Burberry glassframes on a dark meaty mug, excessive jewels on full white mink draping his 300-lb build, scantly-dressed hoochie mama on either arm.

He holds out his bag of buys. “One of you hoes take this sack for daddy.”

“I got it bay.”

Giggly smiles from both women. A simple grunt of pride from the fat man. Real pimps don’t do a lot of laughing. Especially gorilla pimps. Big Baby being one in his own mind. Otherwise he’s something of a sumo hustlah. Everyweek trips down South to Virginia and tobacoo country in the Carolinas, where guns and cigarettes are bought in bulk for dirt cheap then hauled back to NYC and sold for skyrocket prices. An illegal venture made insanely profittable because of the city’s strict anti-gun laws and an idiotic 100% cigarette tax originally meant to quell smoking.

Yet business couldn’t be better, the gats booming hard, and the square packs going faster than crack, infact. Thanks in part to the Colombians, wily co-partners who supply Big Baby’s runners with a fleet of big rigs as well as transport insurance and protection from a grimy bunch that includes psychotic Decepticons and the *other*, more cabalistic Latins.

“Zee, let’s make it, son.”

The fat man and his bitches follow the hoodling down the walk just briefly. Pass a fair-haired gay male cutie window-shopping with a whining bundle wrapped in his arms. To a Cadillac Escalade truck parked curbside.

“No! No! No!” The suited lad arguing on the phone is yelling now. I my dear will do no such thing, you fat black sonofabitch!”

On the driverside of the Caddie, Zee Zee pauses with his hand on the doorhandle. Looks across the truck at his boss. “What the fuck did that wetback just say?” He asks disbelieving, mentally clicking on crazy.

“Sounds to me like he’s begging someone to slap slob outta his mouth.” Big Baby frowns.

“What’s his problem?” One broad whispers to another. “Daddy, you hear him? All crazy-eyed and shit.”

The crabby stranger notices the darting glares coming his way. Holds his free hand up in surrender, understanding at once. He clamps the phone against his chest. “Hey, *esé*. Sorry. I apologize, okay. Just mixing it up with my Niggah, is all I’m doing.”

“You muthafuckah. . .” Zee flicks his cigarette into the street and rushes round front of the truck towards him.

“Ohh. I get it. Because I speak. . . you think I’m racist?!” Swiftly the man jams the phone in his pocket and comes out with a seven-shooter BackUp 9 mili. “Me no xenophobe, homes. These hollows I deliver to you on behalf of the magnificent Negro Latino.” He snap triggers three quick ones.

Direct shots mild but effective. The way Zee Zee’s lifeless body timbers backwards. His busted skull bounces off the frontgrill of the Caddie. Hits the pavement with a thuddle.

“Oh shit!” Big Baby’s beany eyes becomes saucers as he seesaws hastily back up the walk. Shielding himself with his screaming girls. “Hold up, lil buddy!”

“¡*oye!* Bigs!” The cutie gay behind him fast approaches while briskly unwrapping the blanket from a whiny toy baby atop a submini. “The Colombos control no shows!”

The fat man’s frantic reply is at once drowned out by the drumming explosion of machinegun fire. The two women are cut down first, riddled clear cross the midsection. Then the grossly overweight Crooklyn himself, who falls slow and hits the ground hard.

The effeminate shooter then steps over him. Rattles off a few more rounds, ripping away the face’s sunglasses in bloody tatter.

Then the killers drop their burners on the spot and swiftly, but calmly, walks down the street to a waiting vehicle. Both urban street soldiers hop in. The nondescript Ford is gone in seconds.

QUINCE

A day or so after setting foot in NYC, I’m in Jimmy’s Uptown. Quietly sunk in a suitable seat at a table by my lonesome. Close laptop in front of me, Not Rational carry bag at my feet, Sketchers off so my puppies can breathe. Sipping on a hot mug of French Vanilla since LaQuita and I already had breakfast this morning. Damn near hungover from trying to hangout with the Black Barbie last night. Or hang in rather, considering we didn’t have to leave the townhouse to raid a bar.

*Pitié*, how that girl can drink, not unlike me and my sisterhood back in Dartmouth, but still. Suggesting a nice little bordeaux to my P.A. Quita is like asking for a Jack&Jill on Gin and juice, or a hard Royal with a touch of tannin. *Whew!* Gotta admit I luv having the girl around though.

It’s almost eleven when, at last, in walks David Nice, my friend and publisher.

“I know, sweetie, I’m late as ever,” he confesses as we exchange cheek kisses. “But I got held up big time. Meeting with our people here in The Apple. Drama to do with our Chinese partners and the bastards in Beijing. A total stew I tell ya.”

“Davie, that a Porsche I see parked outside?” I have to chuckle my disbelief. “You? Driving a friggin’ Porsche? Wow!”

“Yes dear. But it’s a Spyder hybrid. That makes a difference, you know.” He then falls back across from me and groans. “Oh, Michael did it, Ruthy. Can you believe him. And for half a mill. He knows how I am about the environment.”

I smile. My *pére’*s old business partner is rich and social and gay, although quite handsome in a strong tweedy battered sorta way that reminds me of an old professor I was doing in college.

Since the four years of my father’s passing, however, Davie’s grip on GlobalStorm has slipped significantly. Gradually the lone corporate raider is being raided. Yet since Dad’s death he doesn’t necessarily need the multinational might of a media giant to fight off a world of lawyers and litigation for libel and other crap. Unless you consider *moi*, only I’m not nearly as big or hot as the old man was. In life but death neither.

*Non*, I think what Davie wants now is to go out on his own terms. He luvs literature and visual art. It’s quite possible he intends to peel off for himself GlobalInk, which is the company’s publishing arm, as well as the web unit, among a few other holdings. Which explains in part why he’s becoming so invested in my fledging career.

This current project he’s pretty fixed on.

“Have you send this morning’s *Times*?” He produces a copy and lays it on the table. “The screamer?”

Known Brooklyn larcenist, three others

Brutally murdered! Turf war ensues.

“*Oui!”* I nod. “Caught it on my way down here actually. Can’t be sure but I believe I know who is responsible. Overall I mean.” No way a big small town Catholic girl like me will simply get used to this.

“In the manuscript you mention a concubinage-like group.” David takes pains to be precise. “A secret sex society called *la Prime Famer* or *Famela*. . .”

“*La Primer Familia*, you mean. The First Family.”

“A prostitution ring here in New York?”

“A high-priced prostitution ring that operates from NY to LA to Europe, according to my sources. The top leadership is supposedly Latin-oriented and consists of a gang of young femmes fatales.”

“With Garcia as madam.”

“Murderous, managerial mistress of this criminal household, *oui*.” I take a sip of mud before leaning in to give him more juicy details. “In every city that *la Primer Familia* networks in – Rio, Paris, Miami, London, Havana, Las Vegas, Mexico City, Guatemala City, Tegucigalpa, Managua, Bogota, Caracas – a government official has been compromised.”

“Compromised as in. . .”

“As in a New York Gov-paying-a-nice-grip-in-exchange-for-black-mailable-sex compromised. And as with the Spitzer escort, these aren’t just your typical internet hookers. We’re talking aspiring glamgirls and everyday professionals in some industry.”

“Like up-and-coming models.”

“Style models, dime-a-dozen porn beauties, b-list actresses and local musicians, secretaries and corporate employees, dancers, college chicks, even ex-cheerleaders and young runaways. The squeeze applied by *la Primer Familia* isn’t exclusive to the john, ya know.”

The maítre d’ strolls over. “How are we doing here? Can I get you anything else? More coffee maybe?”

“Sure. Another Vanilla will be dandy. Davie?”

“No, nothing for me, thanx.” After watching the waitress amble off, Davie reaches into his inside pocket, pulls out a card. “Before this trip stateside I received an invoice from our New York office. There’s someone I think you should probably talk with.”

He hands me the card. I look at it. “Skyla Blue Bell. Blue Bell like the icecream?”

Davie nods. “She’s a local assemblywoman. Evidently wrote a kind of ledger on communal wrongdoing that’s become a staple amongst teachers and social service people.”

“Can’t hurt.”

DIECISÉIS

The residence that Quita and I are staying in while in the Big Apple is a ridiculously pricy piece of property. An old peachbrick firehouse classically converted into a four-bedroom bachelorette pad in Tribeca.

Every couple months or so since college I’m in contact with the dames from Dartmouth. There are, say, a couple dozen of us dirty girls of the sisterhood. All spoiled rich brats and bratty bitches of rich fasnication.

Yet to be totally honest, only three of us had been really and truly close, from laughing and crying together to pulling our hair out studying and trying to beat coursework deadlines. Hooked up and partied together too, and with equal fervor. Or at least Emma and me with the sleeping around stuff. Carla was always too prissy to parlay the pussy.

My sisters from a different mister.

They fly up for a visit. Carla anticipates seeing me while Emma act as though she can’t wait to hit New York City. No sooner than we enter my townhouse, all happy and hugged out, the pretty blonde mentions the club scene.

“Not me guys.” Carla removes an adorable camel duffle coat. “I came here to chillax and sis it out with you too.”

“Ditto kiddo. Yet I ain’t got nuthing with showcasing for a littl’ taste of East Coast flava if he right and fine, ya know.” Big sis then pulls a plastic ziplock bag of good green from her Dooney & Bourke purse.

“What’s up with the mary jay on a weekday?”

“No worries, Ruth honey, I ain’t gon’ stank your crib up. I’ma just roll a few to go get right in a few.”

“*Non*, it’s okay. I’m the only one with a little work to do but it’s no biggie. Besides, I’ve been flying solo quite a lot myself these days. Sometime with my young shadow girl upstairs. But kiting it still.”

Emma and I glance at Carla. Gage Ms. Goody-Goody’s reaction.

“Oh, Lord.” The smalltown Oregonian groans. “The last thing I need in New York is peer pressure.”

I order two medium pizzas – one cheese crusted and the other meat luver’s – from this Italian place around the corner. Find some old throwback music to throw on. Soft rhythm and soul tunes we used to rock out to in the halls of Ivy, and we puff puff pass while powwowing it up to countless cuts, the laid-back as well as the profound, from Pink and Nirvana and Kanye to Amy Winehouse and Kings of Leon and Pappa Roach. We do the damn dance, some old Dartmouth moves and muck it up a bit.

No cups or glasses. Drink Spumante straight out the bottle and eat pizza right out the box while lying on a big Canadian coverlet on the heated limestone floor of my lounge. Me in my royal blue satin house jammies. Emma in a pair maroon shorty shorts and top. Carla’s the color of sweet canary. All of us barefoot, satiny hot porcelain dolls.

Our own little Oprah’s camping trip.

Carla takes another hit, gags a bit, then passes the jay Emma’s way before asking me my next trivia.

“Top selling album of all-time?”

“Greatest Hits by Eagles.”

“No. Not any more. Not since the death of so-and-so. . ?”

“Michael Jackson’s Thriller!”

“Okay. That was too easy. Tell me what author did Gore Vidal call ‘a full-fledged housewife from Kansas with all the prejudices’?”

“Truman Capote.” I clap my feet lying on my back. “Now that, *mi querido*, is too easy.”

“Emma Jean, who said James Joyce’s *Ulysses* was ‘the work of a queasy undergraduate scratching his pimples’?

“Eew!” Emma blows smoke handing off the joint. “Oh yes, right. I said it in college. Soon after reading that piece of work’s piece of work.

Laughter.

“*Non*, it was Virginia Woolf.”

“Well, pretty sure I said it after her.”

We get tipsy as hell. Bee buzzed. Speech slurring.

“Well, ladies, I’m tore up from the floor up.” Carla sits leg folded beneath her and swerves. “So I know we aren’t going out anywhere tonight.”

I shake my head. “Can’t see it with a flashlight. I’m too geeked to put up with a bunch of pressing and rubbing hot bodies, all bumping and grinding to put out.”

Emma nods. “Yeah, I think the punanny’s probably in park for tonight. Where’s that young flygirl assistant of yours? She allowed to hang in with us or do you deduct her pay for that?”

“She and a few of her friends are up in the theater room I think.”

“Watching a movie?”

“Emma whatelse would they be doing there?”

“Oh. Like you don’t know.”

“Hey, did I tell ya something interesting happened before I flew out there.” Carla perks up. “I’m a girly Gemini, as you both know. So I wasn’t anticipating much in this month. But that businessman I’ve been blabbing about. When ever it was we talked and I had to text or call you back later.”

“Oh, the fabulous supermarket hoarder from Seattle who’s been buying up all of your daddy’s organic turnout.”

“Married of course.” Gotta throw in my two cents.

“Yes, okay, so married. And he’s a grocer consultant from Vancouver, Washington. Not BC, not DC, as they like to say.” Carla is leaning and laughing at her own joke. “Anyway he’s coming down for dinner with the family next week on his way to Tripoli. Thought I’d give Mum the night off and do the cooking myself.”

Emma chuckles out a groan, raising up and helping herself to the last swallow of Spumante. “Carly, Carly, Carly. Sistah you act like a hundred-year-old broad from the damn Eisenhower era. In a house over some hot stove tryna twirk a jerk thru his somach. This guy is sooo treating you like his mistress. Married to some heifer with who knows what invested while dropping by to ball you on his way to make a buck in the Third World. You ain’t seriously emoting it with this joker, are you?”

That marvelous palish pink face of hers deepens with blush. “Maybe, maybe not. I’m not yet sure how I feel about him, nor he me. I’m trying to keep it all in perspective right now, sis, but it’s pretty difficult to do with this guy.”

“Then try harder, Carly sweetie.” Emma scratches her butt. “Because falling in luv with a wedded piece of wood is a waste of natural resources, I promise ya.”

“Technically, sure.” I take a close-eyed puff and a smoke-filled moment to ponder that one. “However, Emma, for the sake of debate I’d say a cheating spouse isn’t unfaithful to his luver. Just the wife. And almost always the longtime wife especially.”

“That’s because we’re hotter than the piece marinating at home.” Emma chuckles. “But new still gets old, and when the sex stops being worth its stuffing, anything goes. And shit, I’m likely up and gone by then so!”

“I think men are more of a theme park for you Emma, and you, too, Ruth. More so since college,” Carla casually analyzes. “There’s a thematic element of the opposite sex and there you are. Wanting another thrill on that new rollercoaster.”

Emma laughs.

And why not? I don’t disagree with the analogy. But as daring, mind-blowing obstacles work, most *hommes* now days are more ground rides than rollercoasters. And the boy from the islet estate the other day isn’t exactly a twirling-rail cyclone.

“And yet here I lie feeling as though my body’s been rather underutilized.”

“Foreseeable sex a couple times a week is likely a pretty recurring norm for most bitches like us.” Emma appears overtly heady. “But Carly’s dissection of you is absolutely on the money. Why else would you be so deeply invested in this gangstress Jorja Garcia, who sounds the fascinating character by the way, and the dirty component, of real-life prostitution. Nuthing wrong with it, but I’m just saying.”

I suspect she’s right. Emma about the analytical Carla. But also the analysis itself.

Still doesn’t change facts on the ground though. My goal is to create a blockbuster in *The Devil’s Lair*, a true-to-life investigative exposé with enough oomph to uncover societal immorality and rampant corruption, while on its way to cracking open the foundation of *la Primer Familia* – a secret family that doesn’t function within the established laws of the civilised land.

DIECISETE

“Thank you, Lt. Gomez, for the insightful summary sent to our office.”

I hear the oncoming blow-off already in Agent Chris Mass’ tone after we’re all seated in the less-than-cozy conference room at OPP. Few agents. Few cops. All of us around a long, dull-looking wooden table in a hastily-called private meeting that may or may not prove productive.

“Yet, I must say that the gist of it is struggling for solid basis, as the motive of assassination is still only theory at this point. What we need now is augmenting evidence.”

“I think you’re overlooking the FBI’s own dossier then, agent, because, the fact of the matter is that Jorja Garcia’s long been a textbook candidate for the Racketeer Influenced Corrupt Organization act.” I sit directly across from the clever-as-a-fox old fed looking him in the eye.

“Jorja Garcia’s forte is systematized prostitution.”

“As well as tax evasion, money laundering, extortion and a host of other Black Hand exploits for all we know.” I stress this while all of a sudden trying to maintain my composure. “Which is why the Notre Dame Law Professor G. Robert Blakey designed RICO, isn’t it? For criminals like her and situations like this?”

Detective Nick McNabb agrees. “And let’s not overlook this Rico Rivera and his lot.”

“That’s another issue for another day, detective. And not one you good folks here at the NYPD need to concern yourself with.”

“That’s bull and everyone knows it,” I snap. “You’re hiding something.”

“Okay, lieutenant, that’s enough,” Captain Levin speaks up. “Bickering amongst ourselves will get us nowhere.”

I hush. Yet already I’m starting to view this whole darn process with question. I think Agent Mass harbors a kind of subconscious dubiousness towards me because I’m Hispanic. Terrible accusation to make aloud so I don’t. Just a bad vibe I’m feeling.

Levine turns to the peer elder sitting beside him. “So what do you think, Kalfield?”

Jim Kalfield gives a thoughtful frown. “I understand completely what Lt. Gomez is getting at, particularly when Jorja Garcia but also Rico Rivera are both considered ‘authority priorities’ on the bureau profile. Their conspiring guilt of something does appear fairly palpable.” He hesitates. The FBI’s head of Organized Crime Operations in all his learned uncertainty. “Yet, not to sound bluenosed, but Special Agent Mass is right to the extent that no vast criminal machination is clear or so apparent to act. And us moving forth to apprehend either of them in connection with Rogers double murder right now wouldn’t hold up even in a San Fransico court.”

“Could just as easily backfire and hinder the entire probe, infact.” Mass is very much smelling himself now. “Garcia, for one, would go total PR on us. She’d get melodramatic for the cameras and scream police vendetta to the high heavens.”

“Oh, and how the media would just eat that up. They luv to dump crap on the feds.”

“Us as well.” Captain Levine grumbles lost in thought. “None which we need anymore of. Not now.”

“I agree.” Bruce Mouw speaks with a long cigarette dangling from his mouth. The skinny agent in the ugly brown suit is apart of the special squad that led to Jorja Garcia’s original federal conviction, as well as the unit that keeps tabs on her since release. “Garcia’s a young femme pimp who never stopped peddling even while in fed penal, we know that. The so-called ‘Boss Bee’ or ‘Big Apple Madam’ or ‘Black Widow’ – whatever the mysterious moniker. We at the agency believe that she’s an old maven at calling for these kinds of killings.”

“And what specifically does the FBI have as evidence to support such assumption, agent?” I ask nicely.

Jim Kalfield gives his agent the okay nod, and like an awkward, chain-smoking crackerjack, Bruce Mouw commence to peel back whole new layers in the history of Jorja Garcia. He talks about her connection to her ancestral homeland and the sheer treachery of Guatemalan politics, where more than 50 candidates were assassinated during the general election of a single cycle, and in the same year when three visiting Salvadoran congressmen were murdered by rogue policemen, all who were then mysteriously killed themselves.

According to him, a prominent coffee-baron named Khalil Musa was gunned down along with his daughter because Musa knew too much about money-laundering. A month later, Musa’s lawyer Rodrigo Rosenberg was murdered while biking near his Guatemala City home.

“Mr. Rosenberg had taped a video three days prior in which he anticipated his own assassination and put the blame squarely on former Guatemalan President Alvaro Colom and his imperious wife Sandra Torres. They denied it, saying that their right-wing enemies coerced Rosenberg into making the video then had him killed. But that’s neither here nor there.” Agent Mouw coolly grinds out the last of his cigarette with a meticulousness that’s at once irksome.

“Just so happens that Rodrigo Rosenberg’s firm also represented a Central American shell company linked to Jorja Garcia’s old modeling agency,” Kalfield discloses for the Captain’s sake. “A front entity that was paying for Garcia’s prison orders and putting monies on her account all the way up to her release.”

“So what you’re saying is that Jorja Garcia’s connected to political assassinations in Guatemala well before the Congressman Rogers double-murder here?”

“What he’s saying, Lt. Gomez, is that Jorja Garcia is connected to lots of things which have yet to be proven.” Agent Mouw digs in his jacket for another cancer stick. “One of those things being MS-13, which may have helped supply the shooters for many of these killings.”

“*Mara Salvatrucha*.” I know that gang, which is why my next question is: “I thought this North American street herd was a Nicaraguan import?”

“Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras – not a border’s worth of difference!”

“Agent!” Kalfield hushes his old friend Mass with a hand.

The skinny smoker Mouw goes on. “In Central America the MS-13 is but a wild bunch for messy jobs in a disorderly region. In the civilized world, Garcia’s mad hatter is the rich and ruthless Rico Rivera.”

“Who is worth every damn bloody penny!” Mass murmurs.

“Ya see, detective, Jorja Garcia’s always been suspected of having a ton of ill-gotten gains. Her biggest problem back then, and even now, is hiding it. And her kinds of methods are what the late congressman were after. Rogers wanted not just the John Gottis and Johnny Does hounded and put away, but the Jane Does and Jorja Garcias also. This may be our best chance to make a play on *La’Pri’Fa* and the gang.”

“La’Pri’Fa?”

“*La Primer Familia*. Her so-called First Family crime syndicate.”

“But not on Garcia herself?”

“No. Not yet.”

My quiet disapproval is obvious.

Captain Levine looks at his senior fed friend. “So just what do you suggest we do, Jim? Come morning we’ll have to release the Jurdy Weston kid from max holding. The Bureau of Prisons, the department’s arrest rules, heck, the constitution itself suggest we’re breaking our own bylaws while violating due process.”

“He’ll at least be allowed to place a phone call.” That thoughtful expression never seems to leave head Agent Kalfield’s slack-jawed face. “And who knows what he’ll say to that sister of his when he dials her.”

We spend the next ten, twenty minutes discussing this. The technicalities in our bureaucracy’s a bitch. So many political *juegos* open to influence an NYC police officer’s actions and the arc of justice that I’m disgusted.

Then a decision is made.

DIECIOCHO

Forty miles south of New York City, amid a bucolic and largely upper-middle-class suburb of New Jersey, Regina Weston lives alone in a buff-colored stucco home somewhat common in Ocean Township. One of only a handful of young homeowners of color in the quiet community. By all appearances an average New York career girl to locals who see her coming and going. Occasionally chatty with this housewife or that family next door. Known by neighbors as Gina, the pretty accountant. Always friendly and high-spirited.

Whole block’s about to be shocked.

We land late in the evening. Members of the NYPD and FBI leads a posse of uniforms into the Ocean Township community. Black suburban trucks and local OT cruisers come humming down in the cul de sac. Noisily and briskly surrounds the Weston house, a shiny Beemer parked in its driveway.

“I don’t know, partner.” I hop out a front truck with Nick at my side. “The car’s here, *si*, but the place looks a little too quiet. Eerily so.”

“P’s and Q’s people,” Detective Nick McNabb remark as we fall in front of the others. “She just might be expecting us.”

We then trot onto the still property, across nicely groomed lawn. Some two dozen local officers and federal agents. In dark duty uniforms and common business suits. Varied arms from handguns to riot pumps and meaning business.

I look at Chris Mass, the a-hole heading up this swoop.

“Okay. Let’s do it.” The veteran agent readies his Taurus 45cal in one hand. Cellie-talkie and folded federal warrant for one Regina Weston’s arrest in the other, the judge’s signature barely dry.

Split second later both the front and back doors of the home are jamrammed.

We rush in.

“FBI!”

“Police!”

“Lemme see ya, see ya, see ya!”

The place is swarming with shouting cops.

A voice. I hear it but see no one yet.

*Mierda,* it’s just a radio playing. WBLS personality trumpeting a classic. Then Mary J is crooning another one of her heartbreak hotel jammers about a cheating luver that comes home with lipstick on his shirtcollar. Who can distinguish one song from another.

“Back here!”

We find Regina Weston in the master bathroom. Sloshing water. Nude body lying in an oval tub just overflowing a mild running bubbled bath. Shapely tan leg and arm hanging edge side. Stiff manicured hand barely clutching a glass of spilled Brandy.

“That’s her alright.”

My murmur is a sober one, as I stand here betwixt my partner Nick and Agent Mass, all vested and armed, staring with modest awe. At those lifeless raven black eyes, open and slightly rolled into the top of her head, a tiny bullethole above the bridge of her left brow. That noticeable beauty mark seen in surveillance photos now void any vigorous glow.

Shaking his head, Agent Randy Taylor backs out of the bathroom. Probably to vomit. Sexiness is pretty repulsive after death, sometimes nauseatingly so.

“Prat,” one local orders another, “Call the boys out here. We got a cold one.”

The strongest lead in the Congressman Rogers double murder, essentially tying Jorja Garcia and her lot to the nation-rattling crime, has clearly been dispatched.

The Italian Cosa Nostra may have loss but the mafia is very much alive in the land of the free and ferocious. That I know for sure.

Now we do battle!

PART TWO

DIECINUEVE

I’m in the backseat of a Yellow Taxi. Sipping on a big cup of java and browsing thru some files on *la Primer Familia*, Jorja Garcia, and as of late, Rico Rivera while speeding down the snow-glazed West Side Highway.

The end of the year nears and the Guatemalan’s popularity soars dramatically. It all started when routine summary of the Regina Weston’s slaying made the New York daily news cycle and word of the deceased woman’s suspected involvement in the Congressman Rogers double muder was subsequently leaked to the public. Hence, the manner and circumstances surrounding Weston’s death-in-a-tub catapulted the juicy Jersey murder from relatively minor media interest to the sorta coverage reserved for the assassination of a head of state or region advocate, like Representative Matt Rogers himself.

Abashed at how I eat it all up.

Because of the sensational nature of all the homicides, federal, state and local authorities, caving to the freedom-of-information howls from the press, calls Jorja Garcia their prime suspect, thereby making a bitch who’s already a bastion of brouhaha an immediate object of arguably some of the most intense media attention in America right now. A real-life She-Boss. A colorful crime madam. An underworld mistress this millennium.

*Oha si*, and how the woman so affectionately known as Jo-Gar so gratefully rise to the occasion every time – and dresses for it. For the most part she’s treated like any other undeserving celeb, with autographs in order. Not to mention all sorts of disgusting Jo-Gar memorabilia – like pubic clippings, old prison hygiene items, used handkies, worn panties – available thru any of the countless websites dedicated to her.

Thinking about it long and hard for some time now, I’m inclined to believe it’s not simply her Coke bottle physique and come-hither look but also a stylish slant and wicked personality which makes the broad so favorable in spite of her accused infamy.

But then she does look the way goey-eyed lassies and thrill-seeking sistahs want their shero to look. The way growing chest-haired boys and goatish guys envision a femme villain. For such bad broad fulfills the mystic needs of America’s Twenty-First Century. Exhibiting the aura of a hollywod starlet, the bod to die for, the rep of a corporate thug, and yet the affinity of an alcoholic soror. The embodiment and reflection of Americans’ deepest anxieties, wonderment, yearnings, Ammericans’ fantasies and imagination.

Reminds me of our society’s misadventure in morality. Not that I;m a saint or anything but when is a slump too new of a low? I mean with her glittery pussycat chokers and mixed gems the size of marble balls. That naughty hussy doll hairdo. Creamy café au lait luster. Often squeezed in scanty Fetish and Passion Bait and Encanto Niña outfits personally pieced by the designers themselves. Jorja Garcia makes the front covers and headlines of mags and rags for pissing public more than your average elite achiever for some genuine accomplishment.

Yet people appear to luv it no less, especially young *hommes* who currently has her riding high on *Maxim’s* “100 Sexiest Women in the World” list. Some even go so far as to suggest she is being wrongfully targeted by an unqualified government, while others don’t seem to mind her corruption much, if at all.

Questions boldly posed by many Garcia admirers go something like: What’s the difference betwixt a person like Jorja *allegedly*  having a suspect politician killed and a triggy-happy New York cop shooting down some unarmed teen in broad daylight? How can gov’t officials *accuse* Jorjie of crimes including ordering the death of a confirmed murderer named Regina Weston but then turn right around and support the execution death of similarly confirmed murderes on the row? How is Jo-Gar supposedly running a blue chip prostitution ring beneath-the-table any different from greedy tobacco plant owners, churchgoing savings & loan officials, healthcare corpies, banksters and other Wall Street types, all who bait, bill and bilk taxpayers out of tensof billions annually? And anyhow where is the proof?

That being the one question I find myself asking again and again. Reflect on it now, infact, as I allow my attention to stray momentarily from the material in my lap along the icy highway. Even my best source amongst *la Primer Familia*  has nothing of real shade that implicates Jorja Garcia in some great big malefaction.

However careful and calculated though, Garcia revels in her newfound prominence like a drunk fly-by-night pilot bound to crash land at some point or another. Always flashing that seductive Julie Roberts smile, with those irreporachable Debbie Morgan dimples on a kinda Christian Millian face that disarms at the same time its spiffy mouth dismembers. Withouth a doubt the most dark and dangerous damsel today. Quoted on occasions saying things like: “I’m no killer outside my pappi’s bedroom. However many I might be mounting at the time.” And once murmuring on live mic to a reporter who questioned her ill-repute: “Me, a madam? Course not, *caballero*. I merely advise working mamas that’s nice and off-the-chain to maintain and stay ahead of the game, save up and buy a benz and a condo, yo.”

A working girl’s matron that no amount of marimba music can brighten, in my honest opinion. Or what I like to call a cloak-and-dagger situation. Only this one involving the scandalous mix of sex and money floating around Guatemalan bad girl that has some segments of society so excited and paranoid that even the drunks are discreet.

There are breathless reports of how genuine celebrities, actors and rock musicians congregate at the Hamptons mansion parties to kiss and pay homage to the one and only *el Señorita* Jorja Garcia. And how she once attended a private event held at the 40/40 in Atlantic City with Rico Rivera himself at her side, their entourages together sharp enough to outmuscle that protecting the first black US president.

*El señor* Rico Rivera.

Now that’s the one who really has my antennas up. He too made the authorities’ A-list. Only the dapper young *AfroCubano* who passes himself off as a principled businessman skulks the shadows like an old fox on the outskirts of Sicilian society. If Jorja Garcia is the object of prying press and scorching public attention, like say an accused Martha Stewart, then Rico Rivera is given about as much scrutiny as former Merrill Lynch broker and Martha pal Peter Bacanovic. Don’t know who he is? My point exactly.

According to my horse’s mouth, the elsewise gangstah better known as Ri Ri controls some of the toughest Latinos in all of NYC down to the MIA. Supposedly with unlimited funds – enough to challenge cocky Florida Hispano billionaire Jorje Garcia for prime SoBe real estate and win – but alos a combination of criminal, corporate and political ties that allows him enormous power.

Yet he moves, talks, acts and travels like an endangered species. Always quiet and below the radar. “Ri Ri is too gangster to be on TV or appease paparazzi,” my source say. And as a result, for the public at large, Rico Rivera is next to anonymous.

Of course this is partly why I’ve turned my sights on him.

I finally shut the hand-off folder holding my notes. Finish up my java. At eleven o’clock, the taxi cab pulls to a halt curbside my downtown destination. I jump out shouldering my big silver bag. Careful on the icy walk. Amble up the front steps and across the cold pedestrian mall into Once Police Plaza.

Recheck the name on my phone’s saver – Senior Detective Nicholas McNabb.

VEINTE

Nick McNabb spends this morning working alone at OPP. The place isn’t a swamp on weekends in December, and surely not one as icy as this. Anyway he hasn’t a thing else to do. No one to go home to. Besides, he does rather take comfort in the squadroom scenery and the solitude that comes with it.

As a cop’s kid he’s expected to hump just a little bit harder. Work the beat a few years. From Manhattan across Queens Bridge and back. Pursuing hoods like the Homiciders and Pee Wee Kings as far as Peekskill and Kings Part. Before the decades late seepage of traditional American street gangs as Bloods and Crips into the urban pores of metro New York.

He’s a tough cookie, too. Good, honest, but tough as shoe leather. Saint Nick’s his nickname in the old neighborhoods. Zones in which he’s luved, hated and respected by both the lawful and the reckless.

“Nick.” His thoughts are interrupted by a uniform. “Gotta moment?”

He looks up. “Sure, Carter, what can I do for you officer?”

“Just took a message for ya from reception. There’s a Ms. Ruth Desposyni here to see ya down in lob. Big time writer gal. Say she got’cha name from, uhh, assemblywoman Blue Bell something. Now wants to do a pro-PD story. If ya can believe that.”

“Yeah. Think I heard something about that.” Nick gets to his feet. “Thanks officer. I’ll take it from here.”

He follows the uniform out. Goes down to meet his visitor.

Leaving the lobby I almost collide with a fast-walker stepping off the elevator.

“Oh. I’m sorry.”

“No, my apologies. I was. . . you must be—?”

“Ruth Desposyni.”

“Its mlle, or miss. For now.”

Pleasant. Very low-key. I think I recognize him immediately, before he introduces himself even. All fit, fair-haired and fine for a guttersnipe in camel-haired blazer and corduroys.

Our handshake is a jounce too long.

“Is there somewhere we can go and talk, detective?”

“Sure. This way.”

He escorts me up to the office he’s using, to do what, push paper?! I glance around, instantly finding the room to be crammed, musty, rather inhospitable. I’ve been in nicer laundry rooms, bigger bathrooms. Makes you wonder what sorta scanty budget is the NYPD on, and is the department resourceful or financiall capable enough to take on something as might as *la Primer Familia,* let alone bring it down.

I remove my wool Max Mara midi. Fairly modest in get-down-to-business atire that downplays my sexy. I’m no Jorja Garcia, *sûrement*, but I’m definitely not what he expected when he heard some writer chick would be falling thru.

“Thanx for allowing me to drop by.” I sit down in one of the two scarred hardwood chairs. “Sure you’re pretty busy. Or not.”

“The Mademoiselle Ruth.” McNabb nods approvingly as he takes his seat. “So far, I like what I know. Seems that your *Cranberries & Whipcream* column has made something of an impression on a few of my colleagues. Yet why the noble Skyla Blue-Bell suggested you come see me for police analysis, I’m not sure.”

“And yet here I am.” I try winning over with a super smile.

“So what can I tell you?” Only less remoteness in his quiet tone. Great.

“Thank you again detective, and for the compliments about my work especially.” I really am flattered. “You along with a partner, a Lieutenant of Detectives Charlyne Gomez, are both part of a government team heading up the Matt Rogers and Hessa Jovakia case, *oui*?”

His nod shows new caution. “Correct so far.”

“I’m currenting working on a project that deals with *la Primer Familia*.”

“The first family?”

*Non*, the first batch of flowers, dumbass! “The First Family.” I nod, my catsy grays on his deep-set browns. And without averting them, I retreive a thin manila folder from my Not Rational bag, adding, “thru probing of my own I circumscribe the consortium of the furtive crime circle.”

“Oh really?”

“I see your bullshit meter going up, but it’s true. I’ve compiled quite a bit of data on *la’pri’fa* – ranks, memberships, associations, its leadership, bases of location, levels of operation – stuff that should very much interest you and others conducting the Rogers/Jovakia double murder investigation.”

“But you’re in my office.”

“What do you mean?”

“I can’t remember a time that a journalist or writer of any tag just offered to help out the NYPD with no strings attached.”

“Maybe that’s because such writer doesn’t exist.”

“Ah ha!” He expresses a little too much vigor in his voice now. “My point exactly!”

“I mean *bonté aliéné!* This too is a job, you know!”

“Yeah, right!” The cop cops an attitude. “As if you, a Canadian Desposyni beneficiary to daddy’s fortune, really need money!”

Smirking, I remain calm. Not like I never heard sucks sulk to that effect. I do have my haters. “*Non* detective, what I really need is for you to get your head outta your ass for a sec. Or long enough to consider my proposal at the least.”

He looks at his watch in new earnest. “Okay. Half a minute to spit it out.”

“We open a small interchange of info.”

“Pertaining to, what, the congressman Rogers probe?”

I nod clearing my throat. “Which is a luvely lot from where I’m sitting, believe it or don’t’cha.”

Yet he’s already shaking his head no. “Oh, I don’t think so, Miss Desposyni.” He stands back up. “The New York Police, along with the FBI, are conducting an ugly, obviously dangerous and sensitive investigation. A couple murders or more. And beneath the boils of a nefarious mobography. The situation is too difficult, too radioactive, entirely too risky to take such a gamble. Definitely no.”

“Detective, I think that – “

“Besides, I couldn’t even if I wanted to, which I don’t”. He’s inevitably truthful. “And I have to say that this department simply can’t afford to get mixed up in the jellybowl of entertainment and politics right now. No more than it already is. Believe me.”

Sighing, I fake blasé dissapointment. Gather my bag before getting to my feet. “Well, in any event, my thanx to you detective. Guess I’ll go it alone. Sow up help from another department or agency, for my source’s sake if nary else.”

“Wait a minute.” McNabb stops me in my tracks. “You have a pick in *la Primer Familia*?” All of a sudden he’s interested.

“And you guys don’t?”

VEINTE-UNO

At a specified time a silver Chevy Volt parks outside a Shelter Island Heights residence as it does every week. Dr. Edward Handseerg gets out with his black bag. Very casually ambles pass an English-style garden, along the brick walkway leading up to the old two-story home. An 1890 Vickie located in the Long Island town’s historic district.

Oh how he just luvs this place. Always a bit nervous and gleeful as he’s buzzed in and commence to wander. Thru a dimly-lit foyer. Posh brieftain. Spacious livingroom. All so luxuriously furnished with fine wood and rick throws rugs and rare are décor beneath cathedral ceilings barely giving off light.

Soft playing Elton John follows the sixty-year-old oncologist thru Palace 5, the brothel in which the slightly plump and mild mannered chap considered Bellevue’s brightest tends to spend much of his free time. And money.

“Well now. Teddy darling. Hello there.” A woman appears out of nowhere. Supermodel tall and slender in an Azzuré chemise that drags the floor as she meets his approach. “Here at long last.”

“Anna’Maé.” Teddy greets the madam o’ bordello, stammering, coughing and clearing his throat more than necessary. “Had to busy March to get here when I did.”

“The wife, *si*. Walls of despair they are sometimes.” Di’Anna’Mae beams with a gracefulness that grabs him by the pants. Her silver hair in a sparkling Brit bundle that matches her smoky lined eyes. “Come then. Allow me to show you your side joys.”

She takes his arm in hers. Escorts the favored tumor specialist towards the stairwell. As head off Palace 5, Di’Anna’Mae prefers clientele consisting of such faceless professionals in uppersociety because of their generous purchase power.

Although on a common scale weighing class and culture, Asian businessmen pay best for less. Arabs are equally loose with their loot but extremely perverse. Often wanting everything and without protection. While hollywooders, famous athletes and other American celebs are virtually Palace-prohibited. Holding the title for the most hated, the cheapest, the most liable to talk. Often acting as if fame warrants the finest of free fucks.

Upstairs in overdone elegance and wealthiness not missed, the madam o’ bordello stops in the vestibule.

“Jeremi,” she calls out quietly, “company chico.”

Without delay a boy appears in the corridor. Ambling out of a backroom. In glasses. Silly bright tee-shirt. Comfy cotton housepants. Barefoot. Rick Riordan paperback tucked under arm.

“Teddy.” The young teen beams like a bobby soxer. Greets his much older luver with an arm sparingly around the neck and a peck on the cheek. Tender face, boyish, build, dovy complexion, beautiful little shaver illustrating amazingly potent vibes of understated sex appeal. “Thanx Lady Muther Mae. I shall show him in.”

Like a ghost of discreet glories, Di’Anna’Mae is gone to madam over the remainder of the house.

Looping arms with the doctor, Jeremi shows him into a corridor bathroom, where he tosses the young fantasy novel in a soap basket and throws himself on the man who drops his black bag. Passionately hugging and pressing bodies, tongue kissing and slobbering faces with fierce hunger.

“Owh, teddybear. I so miss you. How you didn’t show at my softball game last week.”

“I know. I know. Miss you too. Brought you a gift. You as well as you sister.”

“Later.”

Jeremi struggles to lower the doctor’s pants. The metallic sounds of pocket change and unfastening belt buckle jangles. Reddish hard length comes into view, cock fully free, bobbing eagerly. The boy grabs it, strokes it.

“Let me take a whiz first.”

Teddy turns towards the toilet. Pisses a drinker’s mile. Turns back around and the beautiful lad’s suddenly down on the floor sucking him off. Fellatio unfolds so fast. The good doctor’s moved. His chest a swell of pride. His member being devoured with homerotic deliciousness. Jeremi jacks him, moans yum. His mouth moves like a champ. Teddy’s balls tightening against his chin as the boy looks up at him with soulful dark eyes.

Abruptly he slurps off the knob. Teddy staggers a step. Before he has time to grab hold of something and regain himself, the boy turns off and throws his cottony trousers down to his ankles.

“Come, come hurry.” He bends over. “Before Molly get smart and comes looking.”

Pinkish white buttocks bubbly, captivating. Wiggling at the doc in whspers of want and desire. Closing the space betwixt them, Dr. Edward Handseerg lay hands on him. Pulls part those cheeks to see clearly that peachy dark starfish, its puckered hole winking back at him. Booty brimming anathematic need.

Teddy presses his penis against the rumpenmouth. Nudges his knob twixt the tightest folds. Inch-by-inch stuffs his throbbing erection in pleasently stubborn flest. Till thorough entry proves plant with sliding easy.

Fast they fuck. Erotogenically exhibiting a hushed display of man o’ boy mashing. Thickly and breathless and gratifying to both male and male. Jeremi luvs it while Teddy can’t get enough. Hot nutsac slapping against sensational ass pushing back over and over against marvelous banging.

The boy reaches back to grab at his luver’s humping hips, rubbingly teases the tightness of muscle. The man holds those youthful hips in place, as he pumps and reaches a hand around to grab up a semi-hard ding-a-ling.

Minutes removed and Teddy is shooting his load. Grabbing, jerking, grunting ugly faces, grippy anamuscles milking him muggy.

VEINTE-DOS

“You know my sister Molly.” Jeremi leads Teddy into the adjacent boudoir. “The other kitten is my Olena. *Zydahnu* Olena say hi to Mr. Handsberg. He’s a *doctor*.”

“Hi Dr. Handsberg.” Chimes of a Erasian accent. “Nice to finally meet you.”

“Hey Teddybear.”

“Molly.”

The two femmes sit facing one another on the fluffy floor before a poppy princess daybed, bare legs crossed indian-style, playing some kinda colorful boardgame equipped with keypads and sporadic tunes. Both well-behaved, good-looking lassies snugly-clad in shorty shorts and bursting tops. Like sex toys willing and ready to take it any way the big boys give it to them.

Happy as ever, Molly is on her feet and in Teddy’s arms. “*Baabbyy*. I’m so so glad that you’re here. *Uumm*. Haven’t been to bed with a living body for two whole weeks now at least.”

“Oh, Molly, I always do miss you.” Chuckling, Teddy grinds himself against the breasty fresh and well shaped tart. Surgical hands just caress those lush young curves. “You look and smell so darn good tonight. I brought you a present.”

“Oow! Really?” The crystal-eyed American beauty sqeauls at him. “Gimme gimme.”

“It’s over in my bag there.” He kisses her square on those sweet rosebud lips. “But you’ll earn it first.”

One of his all-time favs, Molly is an MTV junkie and depraved sexkitten in natural new world order. The first fuck Teddy and the cheeky young teenybopper fulfilled together, str8 missionary was the move of the day. The second time was a fairly conventional threesome – or 3some eatsome act – with another blonde youngin’ now residing in Europe following an unrelated pregnancy; Teddy banged each Barbie from behind while she ate the other. Since then, however, things degenerated, albeit nicely. Phony porn, bondage, spanking, watching the steroid-dick doctor bone her brother, whatever, whatever.

Yet now the new nymphet in the room grabs his attention. “Dyevushka pomagat tam chilovyek na dvarye tam adyezhda pashalsta.” She beams with shy allure spread about those soft apple-cheek features. Big voilet irises moving back forth and forth from young to older man.

Jeremi smirks. “My hobby inamorata. Olena is Siberian,” he whispers in explanation. “My secret hobby I might add.”

“Because you, too, are in luv with the log.”

“Well, of course, Teddybear, yet still I’m afraid my Olena isn’t old enough to attend certain PG movies without parental discretion.”

After several moments of coital convo, kisses and caresses, Jeremi orders his little sister off. To fetch a couple shotbottles of Sweet Vermouth, Teddy’s fav, and two “little pink pills,” which are female sexual stimulis drops necessary for hours of humping.

By the time Molly returns from her reluctant mission, she discovers raw gangbang action already on and amplified full throttle.

The Siberian tween whimpering naked in a hot and juicy guy-girl-guy sandwich. Lying stretched atop Teddy in the squeaking daybed. Up and down astraddle his crotch with her face frowning in his salt-n-pepper haired chest. His skilled old hands holding the girl’s bubbled buttcheeks spread. Jeremi jamming his meatstuff in her upthrusting ass.

“You guys!” Molly cries foul.

Then quickly she ambles closer round the raunchy fest to see better. Three groins gyrating, grinding, glistening. Teddy’s liny, vessel-marked dirk mushrooming deep in Olena’s drenched quim, seemingly splitting her baby-fine slit to the inside tender. The girl’s inner thighs clapping down on his sides as he buries himself up to the balls in candycunt.

Madly Jeremi strains pushing stringy cock in his femme luver’s quivering duke, his boyish soft hips churning against hers, amorously violating her damp anus. All causing Olena to squeal and moan in the doctor’s savagely frenching mouth.

“Wow! Molly just probes down around the reckless pounding. “All that thick, mashing babyfat.”

“That’s not babyfat.” Teddy comes up for air. “That’s fat, baby.”

Jeremi grunts his agreement.

Then, both men’s hands gripping the girl’s slim waist and soft thighs to better hold on to her, the gratifying double penetration accelerates. The dicks drive harder, quicker; plunders her silky ass, rippling those milky cheeks; slams the fuzzy-haired tween pussy faster and stronger and faster and more pointedly.

So overwhelmed, Olena whines in her native tongue, those violet eyes tightly shut, tears tasting fine as wine rolling down that lust-contorted face, her fairly lush body dewy with sweat.

Then Jeremi hisses and cums. Hot and heavy. Rips his johnson out of his moaning luver’s still gaping asshole, and just let’s his squirting glaze-honey coat her toasty buns.

“Pull her off me!” The reputable oncologist yells as the build in his nutsac begins to boil over. “Now, Jere, now!”

Jeremi tears his girl free right as his male luver jerks with ecstacy.

“Allow me.”

Molly drops everything and jumps mouth-first on sugardaddy Teddy’s spilling, cum-slick dick. Proudly polish him off. Deftly hand-pumping and gumming and pulling and sucking him down to the last drop of nut.

While the inescapably agreeable Dr. Edward Handsberg can’t help but finger the girl’s hair, hopelessly cramming her face fully on his cock, jamming it down her soothing throat for a genuine headjob.

Only then, after another minute or so of tending to his Viagraic erection with gentle puppy luv licks, Molly comes up to catch a decent wind.

She mumbles something unintelligible.

Raising, Teddy rubbingly grabs her hair, fists it, tilts her head back, her face up towards him. “Not nice to talk with your pretty mouth full. “He pecks her on the tip of her nose. “Swallow it.”

She does, once, twice, and again, till her throat clears itself of semenal sluice.

Young cherry snappers, bananas, sweet bootybread. All hallmarks of the Eternal Palaces, which are in essence the cornerstone of la’pri’fa’s high-priced prostitution monopoly.

Meanwhile, doorbells chime, Palace 5 being a most magnificent place for local decision-makers and Big Apple seeds rolling in dough. Somewhat surprised, Di’Anna’Mae checks the password of the day. Finds it correctly matching. Thus she ambles down sipping her fourth drink already today. And it isn’t yet dark out.

The doorbell chimes again.

“Patience pervagons.” The madam o’ bordello talks to herself while fishing a tiny little remote from her sliplet. “Horny horses we are.”

From the dining area of the mansion, she buzz open the garden-gates outside. Subsequently and without warning, the front door is smashed in, its elaborately carved wood splinters loudly and crackles open.

Shocked still or all of two seconds, a recoiling Di’Anna’Mae has just enough time to spin and hit the panic button – sealing off the stairwells, files and finance rooms – before she is so abruptly trampled by swooping home invaders. Blue-white fatigue-clad figures barging in from the snow. Armed with blackjacks and shiny South American machetes. Barking in bilingual with traces of Colombian accents.

Very brutally bashes the madam’s head in, trashes the place, start a fire, disappear in minutes.

The eminent Palace now a subtle slaughterhouse.