



**IF I DID IT**

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**AUTHOR'S NOTE:**

If I did it, this is what happened.



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1.

# THE LUCKIEST GUY IN THE WORLD

I'm going to tell you a story you've never heard before, because no one knows this story the way I know it. It takes place on the night of November 9, 1999, and it concerns the murder of a Chilean-American prostitute and a young busboy/pimp. I want you to forget everything you think you know about that night because I know the facts better than anyone. I know the players. I've seen the evidence. And, of course, I've read all the stories: That I did it. That I did it but don't *know* I did it. That I can no longer tell fact from fiction. That I wake up in the middle of the night, consumed by guilt, screaming.

Man, they even had me wondering, *What if I did it?*

Well, sit back, people. The things I know, and the things I

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believe, you can't even *imagine*. And I'm going to share them with you. Because the story you know, or *think* you know—that's not the story. Not even close. This is one story the whole world got wrong.

First, though, for those who don't know me, my name is Girth McDürchstein—"G.McD" to most people. Many years ago, a lifetime ago, really, I was a pretty successful musician. I set the world ablaze with songs of hope and sexual conquest, won a Ghana Awareness Award for my hit song "Rolling in It," and was named *Hardbord Magazine's* "Most Puzzling Heavy-Metal Icon" three times.

I did a little acting, too, and for a number of years I was pitchman for *Piru Paska*, Finland's least successful laxative of all time. Some of you might remember me from the television spots: I was always wailing—in original songs I wrote, produced, and performed in Finnish—about my strong desire to defecate, squatting like a gymnast, until my "wife" (played by a Finnish actress whose name I never caught) gave me a Piru Paska tablet and an ocean of shit spewed forth. If you don't see the irony in that, you will.

All of that was a long time ago, though, a lifetime ago, as I said—all of that was before the fall. And as I sit here now, trying to tell my story, I'm having a tough time knowing where to begin. Still, I've heard it said that all stories are basically love stories, and my story is no exception. This is a love story, too. And, like a lot of love stories, it has a happy ending.

Let me take you back a few years, to the summer of 1998. I

was engaged then, to my girlfriend, Sarah Goss (of the band Red-stain Attack!), and we were getting ready to celebrate the upcoming release of *Backseat Delightlab!*, but it was not a good time for us. Sarah and I had been on shaky ground for months—basically, from the time I proposed—and at one point we had actually separated, but we reconciled for the sake of the phenomenal sex. A few months into it, though, while Sarah and I were in the middle of dinner, she set down her Burrito Supreme® and gave me a hard look.

“Hey,” I said, arching my eyebrows, misinterpreting her bitter stare for a look of sheer eroticism.

“This isn’t working,” she spat. “And I’m five months pregnant.”

I knew the marriage wasn’t working, but the news of the pregnancy was a real shock. Even that couldn’t prepare me for what came next:

“With Little Riffs Nicky’s child.”

We finished dinner in silence—we were in the VW Bus I had parked on Fairfax in Little Ethiopia, which I had been living out of since my arrival in Los Angeles in 1994—and after dinner we went to bed, still silent. I lay there in the dark, thinking about the unborn baby, considering whether or not anyone would miss Little Riffs Nicky, a single only child whose parents had passed on. I knew Sarah would never consider an abortion, and it made for a very strange situation: The first true McDürchstein (I had my name

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legally changed in 1996 but was born Matthew Phillips) would be joining a family that never truly existed.

In the morning, I told Sarah I was going to Venice Beach for a night or two, to smoke a few joints and think things through, and I packed a small bag and asked her to sleep in my empty parking space until I returned.

On my way across town, I stopped at a Carl's Jr. to have a few burgers, then paid for it and left. As I made my way down the street, heading back to my Bus, I ran into a guy I knew, and we went off to have breakfast at Winchell's, a couple of blocks away. We bought a box of doughnuts and ate them on the curb, and that was when I saw her: On a billboard facing Venice Boulevard, that crooked smile, horse-like chin, fuckable body, with an ass that could knock a man over.

"Who are you?" I asked.

The billboard did not respond.

The guy I was with asked me if I felt all right.

I stood up in a daze, walked across six lanes of light traffic, and began to caress the billboard. He had his answer: I was fine. I searched the billboard for some sort of identification. It advertised Hydropaste, a new organic toothpaste made of dead leaves and grass clippings. At the bottom, in tiny letters I could not have read from across the street, I saw a small photo credit: *Photo: Margo Atwater for The Reaver Agency*, with a phone number.

I pulled out my new portable phone, raised its antenna,

dialed, pressed “send,” waited for the call to fail—the first one always did—then dialed again. It failed again, so I went a half-block up the street to a pay phone, dropped in 35¢, and I was on my way.

“Reaver Agency,” an androgynous voice announced.

“May I speak with Ms. Margo Atwater, please?”

“Hold.”

The hold music played a Nelson song, though I don’t recall which one. After a few minutes:

“This is Margo,” blared a honking New Jersey-cum-N’Orleans accent.

“My name is Girth McDürchstein,” I said. “I’m a musician and I must bed you.”

She *was* from New Orleans, she told me, from a particular section where more people develop accents completely unlike the usual Louisiana dialect—they end up sounding more like Fran Drescher (then an unpopular sitcom star) than the Cajun Cook—and she came up for the summer to jumpstart a career in modeling.

“How old are you?” I asked.

“I just turned eighteen last month,” she said. “On May 7.”

“I’m sorry I missed your birthday,” I said.

“Me, too,” she said, and I could tell she was smiling that gorgeous, crooked smile, a slight imperfection that made her all the more flawless—equally as sexually attractive as the lack of arms on the *Venus de Milo* or the crack on the Liberty Bell.

“So,” I said, drawing the word out, “what are you wearing?”

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After breakfast, I made the two-minute drive to Venice Beach, and I spent the night over there thinking about my unsatisfying relationship, and trying not to think about what the gorgeous young model had been wearing. When I got back from the beach, I went to Little Ethiopia, having resolved absolutely nothing, and I discovered a Ford Tempo parked in my space. It took half an hour to find another space on the same block. A few nights later I looked up the address of the Reaver Agency and took the bus up to Hollywood. Six hours later, I arrived on the right block. Margo stood on the corner, smoking an unfiltered cigarette, and I took her into the alley. “I want you to know that I’m engaged, but that my relationship is ending,” I said as I rubbed her soft chest. “So, you know—I’m still technically ‘with a chick.’ I don’t know if that bothers you, but if it does I’m just letting you know that things are going to change soon.”

“It doesn’t bother me,” she said, taking my head and sliding it down into her sweet treasures.

“It’s the truth,” I said, hoping she didn’t notice my voice crack.

Later that same night, I stopped by her apartment, on Yucca Street, and took her to a party. By the end of the evening, I was hooked.

That was in June 1998. For the next month, I saw her almost every single day, until it was time to leave for tour. I missed her, and I spoke to her constantly. I also spoke to Sarah Goss, of course, to ensure she was miserable and unable to fuck around on me (I

hadn't officially broken it off with her), and to make sure the pregnancy was going okay, but I was pretty confused. I had a fiancée back home, a kid on the way that technically belonged to my bandmate (we talked it out early on in the tour and everything was cool) and I was already falling in love with another woman.

I came home in time for the delivery of the baby, but split almost immediately after to rejoin Abysmal Crucifix, the band I founded in 1992. When the tour ended, I returned to L.A. and took a room at Oceanside Suites, a boarding house in Glendale, that was neither oceanside nor a suite. I found myself pretty much living two lives—one with Sarah, as a confused husband and unwilling “father,” and the other with Margo, my new love. I spent most of my time with Margo, of course, at the hotel or at her little apartment, and from time to time—when I had to leave town for a gig—she'd hit the road with me.

Margo also met the band, but I waited an entire year before I made the introductions. I was a little wary, for obvious reasons, but Margo took to them as if she was a member of the band herself. They liked her, too. Especially Riffs. Before long, the band refused to show up to rehearsals, gigs, or recording sessions unless Margo was a part of it.

I've got to tell you: Life was pretty good. I felt like the luckiest guy in the world.

The following year, I moved out of the Oceanside Suites and into the North Hollywood home of my old friend Gary Tuckett,

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and I asked Margo to move in with me. I think everyone saw us as the perfect couple, including Margo, but as the weeks turned into months she began to drop not-so-subtle hints about getting married. I kept trying to put her off, of course, because marriage terrifies me, but Margo kept pushing. This led to a number of heated arguments, and from time to time I was sure we were finished, but we were survived—mostly because Margo had faith in us. She believed our relationship was special, and that we could beat the odds, and pretty soon she had me believing it, too.

In late 1998, I finally dumped Sarah for good, and Sarah's lease was up on her Studio City apartment. She was going to just leave, but Margo talked her out of it. "This is a beautiful place," she said. "All it needs is a little fixing up."

She walked me through the apartment, from the main room to the only bedroom, telling me what we could change, and how it would look, and it was obvious that she had an eye for that kind of thing. She ended up redesigning and redecorating the whole place, top to bottom: a black satin tablecloth here, a decorative gold-plated skull there, a nineteenth-century candelabra on the ceiling, beads in place of the bedroom door. I encouraged her to become a licensed interior decorator, but she felt discouraged when the state board reviewed photos of our apartment and sent a sternly worded rejection letter.

She was happy. Sort of. The fact is, we still weren't married, and I couldn't go a week without hearing about it: *Didn't I love her?*

*Didn't we have a future? Couldn't we have children now, while she was still young enough to enjoy them?* These little discussions often ended in arguments and wild, impassioned sex. I often found myself dehydrated, and by the end of 1998 I came to dread it (literally). Margo had a real temper on her, and I'd seen her get physical when she was angry—in more ways than one! Sometimes I just left the house and spent the evening in my car—by that time, a supercharged hearse—masturbating quietly as I waited for the storm to blow over.

Finally, in January of 1999, we got engaged. We had a big party, and Margo seemed very happy, but it didn't last. Within a few weeks she was pushing me to set a date. "I'm tired of being your lady," she kept saying. "I'm used to fucking married men!"

The woman had a point, but I just wasn't ready to commit, and it wore her down.

One night in February, we were in the middle of another argument, and I went outside to get away from her. There was an old piñata hanging from a nearby tree, and a dried-blood-encrusted baseball bat drifting in the wind. I picked up the bat and took a few hard swings at the piñata, hoping to get a taste of sweet candy. Margo came out of the apartment and watched me for a few minutes, still angry, glaring, and I crossed into the driveway, sat on the hood of her 1955 cherry-red Cadillac El Dorado convertible. I still had the bat in my hand, and I remember flipping it into the air and accidentally hitting the windshield of a nearby Toyota Tercel. Its

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car alarm began to squeal.

“Shit!” she yelled. “We better get out of here!”

We ran back into the apartment, where we could still hear the alarm. Panting and sweating, I threw her against the wall and had my way with her. I finally understood the good thing that could be had from rage-based sex, a grudgefuck if you will.

A few hours later, a police officer knocked on the door. Margo answered it wearing next to nothing, and the cop stared agog at her heaving bosoms and taut abdomen.

“A few eyewitnesses say they saw the man who lives in this apartment throw a baseball bat at Mr. Kornblum’s windshield,” the officer said.

“You must be mistaken,” Margo said breathily, losing any trace of the accent to which I had become accustomed. “There isn’t any man living here.”

“Yes, well—”

“Would you like to *come* in?” she asked, dropping her slinky half-lingerie, half-bathrobe.

He stared at her flesh, still glistening from our minutes of passion earlier, and was about to move his hand forward when she smacked it away. “Just take an eyeful and remember where you got it,” she snapped.

The officer’s eyes bulged as much as his pants, and finally he turned and ran away. We never saw him again. Margo shut the door and turned to me.





## THE NIGHT IN QUESTION

I was in a lousy mood after leaving the strip club. I was exhausted, and not looking forward to tomorrow's marathon drive to Chicago, but most of all I was upset about my brief conversation with Estebán Domínguez. I didn't like what Estebán had said about the former Reaver Agency girls as they had hit the stage at Fred's Lounge: *We don't know the half of it*. The half of it I *did* know about was bad enough, but Estebán seemed to think it was worse than either of us imagined. I also thought back to my conversation with Flora, Estebán's wife, and felt another twinge of guilt. I'd pretty much given up on Tatalía, but a part of me still loved her. I had to do something; if not for her, for me.

For a few moments, sitting on the hard bed of the Mountain

Valley Motel, I wondered if I should run to her house and attempt to win her back. The idea was not to marry her—I knew that would destroy my relationship with Margo once and for all—but to make a grand gesture so she understood how much I cared but how little I wanted to commit. The girl needed to understand a man has needs.

As I was thinking about this possibility, Riffs showed up. He was carrying a towel and a magazine and asked if he could use the in-room Jacuzzi (for suites only—Riffs’ dingy little room upstairs didn’t have one).

“Sure,” I said.

“How was the strip club?”

“Fine.”

“Did you talk to Tatalía?”

“I went out of my way to *not* talk to her,” I said.

“You look bummed, man. What happened?”

“Nothing,” I said. “This shit’s endless. You should’ve seen the tassels she had on. She thinks she’s still a teenager.”

“Can I ask you something?” Riffs asked. “Why is Tatalía so fucking mad at me?”

I didn’t want to get into it—all that business about Riffs leeching free room and board off of me without doing anything to earn it while I took my road trip—so I told him not to worry. “You know how she is,” I said. “She puts her anger and craziness on everyone else.”

I noticed the magazine in his hand. It was the current issue of *Gutter Tramps*. Riffs flipped it open and showed me one of the girls inside, a vaguely attractive brunette of nearly dwarf-like stature, with unimaginably mountainous breasts. He said he knew her and could introduce me, but I wasn't interested. He went off to get into the Jacuzzi and I found myself thinking about a groupie I'd known some years back. She looked a little like the girl in *Gutter Tramps*, only proportional. I dug through my old address book and found her phone number scrawled on a torn-off piece from a Wendy's Classic Triple wrapper—I could still smell the beef!—and when her answering machine picked up I left a message. "Hey, it's me. Girth. I wanted to see how you were doing, and to tell you that I'm a free man—a *totally* free man. Call me." I hung up and realized that I really *did* feel kind of free, but the feeling only lasted a few moments. I found myself thinking about Tatalía again, and then about Margo. I was pissed at Tatalía, and Margo was pissed at me *because of Tatalía*. Maybe I should have gone back to L.A. and taken Margo to that reception. I had tried to be respectful of Tatalía and the Domínguezes, but once again I got bit in the ass for my efforts.

I checked the money-pit hollowed into my guitar case and noticed I only had hundred-dollar bills. I knew I'd need a few fives for coffee in the morning, so I went into the bathroom to see if Riffs had any change. He was already done with the Jacuzzi, which he'd left running, and I turned it off and went upstairs to his tiny piece of shit room.

“Riffs, man, please try to remember to turn the Jacuzzi off when you get out,” I said.

“Did I forget to turn it off?” he asked.

I would have wondered about his sanity, except I’d known for many years that Riffs suffered from a rare dissociated schizoaffective disorder that affected the way his mind processed information. It forced him into a bizarre speech pattern that I’ve, fortunately for you, ignored in order to streamline the story, but it still resulted in plenty of strange behavior I will document. “Yeah, Riffs. You forgot to turn it off.”

“I’m sorry.”

I held out a C-note and asked if he could break it, but all he had was twenties. I borrowed one, and told him I’d pay him back. “I need it,” I said. “I just realized I haven’t eaten anything, and I’m going to run over to Taco Time.”

“Can I go with you?” he said.

“Sure,” I said. “But hurry up. I’m pressed for time.”

We took the hearse and ordered at the drive-thru window. I ate my Casita Burrito and Mexi-Fries on the ride back. Riffs saved his for later.

I was busy eating, so I didn’t talk much, and I found myself thinking back to the strip club, and to how cute Chipper had looked up on stage, doing her little feather-boa routine. It put me in a dark mood. A dark, erotic mood. The last few times I’d tried to call Tatalía to try to get with a Reaver girl, which I often did on the

spur of the moment, she had gone out of her way to make it hard for me. In so many ways. She always found some reason to not let me take them. *She's on her period. She's just eaten. They've had enough excitement for one day.*

I couldn't understand it. She didn't even want me to pay her to see them. It seemed like she was making everything as difficult as possible for me. It's true what they say about never really knowing another person. Tatalía wasn't even Tatalía anymore. She was a complete stranger to me.

I finished the burrito and felt lousy. It had gone down wrong.

When we got back to the motel, I went inside and started packing, laying some of my things out on the bed. Then I went into the closet to get my guitar. I began to strum quietly. I couldn't seem to stop thinking about Tatalía, though. Usually, when I pick up a guitar, the world disappears—that's one of the things I like about the instrument—but this time, I couldn't get her out of my head. I remember thinking, *That woman is going to be the death of me.*

It was probably around 3:30 by then. I figured Tatalía and the girls and the Domínguez family had finished dinner and gone their separate ways. As I found out later, they'd eaten at Zimorino's Red Pies, an Italian restaurant on Higgins Avenue, in the heart of Missoula. Tatalía's mother, Juana, had left a gold-plated thong at the restaurant, and she'd called Tatalía, who called the restaurant, and they learned they'd found the thong. She was also told Estebán Consueles was just finishing his shift bussing tables, and that he

would be happy to drop off the thong at the Kiwanis condo when he was done. I knew none of this, of course. None of this had anything to do with my life. Not then, anyway.

I set the guitar aside and fished out my portable phone and called Margo from the parking lot. Either she wasn't home or she wasn't answering; I think it was the latter. I'd called her several times that day, to apologize for not coming back to L.A., and it looked like she was determined to punish me. Hell, for all I knew, she was already thinking about moving on. Knowing her, she had probably already changed the locks and thrown my stuff onto Moorpark. If that was actually the case, I had Tatalía to thank. The lesson here was simple: While it's very easy to find yourself entrapped in a situation where you need to pay a stripper for sex, don't let their soft flesh and tight ass mess with your mind.

Suddenly I felt exhausted. I was getting old. I could hardly walk anymore, and I was recently told I'd either need to quit smoking weed or filter it through a vaporizer. Plus my joint was killing me from everything that had happened the night before. To solve both problems, I opted for an illegal Percodan® prescription. It apparently wasn't interacting well with the burrito I had for dinner.

I parked my ass on the low wall near the pool, feeling whipped. I was trying to figure out how it had come to this. I'd been somebody once. I'd had my glory days on the stage, a number of high-paying corporate events, many years as a musician, and even some-thing of a career as an erotic *masseur*. It wasn't over, not by a

long shot, but everything seemed more difficult now. It was a little like that business in *West to Heatherborough*, where they have to run and make logs roll just to stay in the same place without sinking into the river. But hey, if that's what it took, that's what I'd do. You don't get anywhere in this crazy world unless you fight for it, and I was willing to fight for it. Still, it seemed like every day it took a little more energy, and Tatalía was sapping a lot of my goddamn energy.

That got me thinking about prostitution, the *meaning* of prostitution, and specifically the many women I had paid to sleep with me over the past five years. Even when you're paying them to love you, however briefly, you share something special. A magical spurt of destiny—it changes you, the both of you, forever. This is why, in every encounter I had, I took the care to learn about them, their lives, their pimps, their dreams. I kept in touch. Often, I gave them repeat business—in every conceivable way.

The way I, and the women I've shared my seed with, saw it, life wasn't about us as individuals anymore—it was about what we had shared, together. And because I felt so strongly about my responsibilities, I made it work—whether my temporary companion wanted it to or not. We talked on the phone at least once a week, but it was rarely about me trying to get off—it was about them, and how they were progressing with their dreams of art school and eventual fulfillment and fortune. And whenever there was a problem with their pimp or hiding bodies, we handled it together.

I suppose I inherited this feeling from my father, a man who spent more time in Cedar Rapids brothels and whore-barns and than anyone in the state. At the time, I was reluctant to acknowledge the intoxicating power and beauty of paid relations, and my father and I had our altercations. I found myself getting beaten on almost a daily basis. In those days, there were beatings, and everyone knew it. You didn't go crying to Child Welfare or any of that shit, because nine out of ten times if you got a beating, you almost certainly deserved it. I know I didn't, but my father's belt begged to differ.

Then one day when I was sixteen years old, the old man and I had a little falling out. I disrespected him and called him all manner of foul names. Just as he was about to start beating me, my mother came home and asked what had happened. I told her, and in my version of the story—which I firmly believed—my father had done wrong. My mother didn't buy it, though. She told me to go to my room, and I know I was supposed to go in there and wait for them to have sex, which would be followed immediately with a stern beating from my father. But as I waited, I decided I wasn't going to allow this to happen. I didn't deserve it, and there was no reason in hell I was going to let him raise his hand to me. When he came into my room, I told it to him straight. "Fuck you, you gay-ass motherfucker!" I said.

"What did you say, boy?"

"You heard me," I said. "You eat women's asses like they

were ice cream cones and men, and you're wrong this time. You try to whup me, I'll kick your ass."

It was pretty tense. I had defied him, and he didn't like it one bit, but he could see that things had changed. I was almost as big as he was by then, and I knew I could take him, and so did he, I guess. He left my room without saying a word to me, angry as hell, and for the next ten years we didn't talk because he died of mysterious circumstances a few weeks later. The coroner ruled it a heart-attack, and I agree with that. It was like family lore: *The boy defied him, and he died because of it.*

Now here it was, a decade later, with my own whore troubles, and I began to realize that there really are two sides to every story—and that maybe my father wasn't such a bad guy after all. I'm not suggesting I was fully conscious of it, mind you, but I believe that I began to see that I'd been pretty hard on him—and that, whatever else had happened, he had always been there for me. That was an important lesson for me, and that night, staring out at the lit-up pool, my stomach rumbling, thinking about all of this, it hit me with a weird kind of clarity: *If you flick up your whore relations, you try not to fuck up your real relationship.*

I figured the Domínguezes would be in bed by then, over at the Kiwanis condo, fast asleep. I hoped so, anyway. I wondered who Tatalía was doing at that moment, and I wondered what other unpleasant surprises lay in store for me and Riffs. For a moment, I thought back to the night I'd surprised her at the Glendive ranch,

going at it on the couch with her friend Jimmy, in the hum of two dozen Sybians—while *her parents were in the house*. It made my stomach lurch.

Don't get me wrong: Tatalía did amazing things, taking care of a largely invalid foreign family while mounting a small business, but she'd been screwing up big time lately—in more ways than one.

It's strange. They say people don't change, but I say they're wrong. People change, but it's usually for the worse.

Estebán's words came back to haunt me: *We don't know the half of it*, he'd said. He was right. We didn't know shit. Tatalía was on the fast-track to hell, and she seemed determined to take everyone she knew with her—especially me!

I shut my eyes and told myself to stop thinking about her. I looked at my watch. It was 4:03. I needed a shower, and I had to finish packing. As I got to my feet, an unfamiliar car slowed near the gate on the other end of the pool, then pulled past and parked a short way down, across the street. The driver got out and waved from the distance, and at first I couldn't tell who it was. When he came close, I saw it was Jennifer 8. I'd met her some months earlier at a dinner with mutual companions, and I'd seen her again a few weeks earlier, when I'd hired her to perform services. I liked Jennifer—she was one of those girls who is always in a good mood, always willing to try things Margo never would—and I told her what I tell a lot of people: *Stop by when you're in the neighborhood. I always*

*have enough cash on hand for my ladies.*

I had guessed she took me literally.

Now picture this—and keep in mind, this is hypothetical:

Jennifer 8 walked around the pool, and the first thing I noticed was that she wasn't smiling.

"Girth, my lovely tripod—what's up?" she said. It sounded kind of forced.

"What's up with you?" I said, looking her up and down. She wore a form-fitting Lycra® go-go suit that allowed me to see, in detail, the outline of her pebbly areolae and cameltoe. I took a deep breath and licked her face, my usual way of greeting ladies. "What brings you to my parts?"

"Not much. I was out to dinner with a John, up to Great Falls. I thought I'd stop by to say hello."

"You've got a strange look on your face, Jennifer 8," I said. "Did you raise your rates again?"

Jennifer 8 looked away, avoiding my eyes. "It's nothing, man," she said.

"Come on," I said, taking her face in my hands and holding it close. I could feel her breath, hot and reeking of sausage—in more ways than one. "You can tell me."

Her eyes flicked as she struggled with her thoughts. "You're not going to like it," she said finally.

My stomach lurched again and right away I knew. "This is about Tatalía, isn't it?"

Jennifer 8 nodded.

“What about her?”

“You’re not going to like it,” she repeated, sliding her hand along the crotch of my leather shorts.

“Just tell me,” I said, already riled. “Before I get pissed off.”

Jennifer 8 took a step back, like she thought I might hit her or something. She was probably used to that treatment from her clients and managers. “A couple of these guys at dinner tonight, I guess they didn’t know that you and I were friends,” she began, tripping over the words as if she had cock-in-mouth syndrome. “They started talking about this little trip they took to Saskatchewan a few months back, in August I think it was, and about these girls they partied with.”

“Yeah?”

Jennifer 8 took a moment. “It was Tatalía and her friend Blondell.”

“I’m listening,” I said. I tried to stay calm, but I was fit to explode in every conceivable meaning of that word.

“There was a lot of drugs and a lot of drinking, and apparently things got pretty kinky.”

“Why are you fucking telling me this, woman?!” I hollered. I turned and had to fight the urge to put my fist through the Chrysler Imperial’s window.

“I’m sorry, man. I thought you’d want to know.”

“Well, I don’t fucking want to know! I’m sick of hearing this

shit!”

“I’m sorry—”

“But...I thought she loved *me*,” I said softly, feeling tears rise. I betted them down with thoughts of Margo.

“I know, man. I’m sorry. That’s why I told you. I know you two have been through a lot of shit, and I know it can’t easy, and I thought maybe if you talked to her—”

“*Talked to her?*! What the fuck is wrong with you? I been tryin’a talk to her for *days*. She won’t listen to me. She won’t listen to her family. She won’t listen to her friends!”

“Girth, man—I’m not the enemy here.” As if to prove this, she partially unzipped her dress and slid one of my hands inside. Cupping her warm, soft flesh made my warm, soft flesh hard as steel, but before long rage took over again.

I turned around, fuming, and tried to count to ten. By the time I got three I’d gone soft again. Jennifer wasn’t the enemy. *Tatalía* was the enemy. I looked at my watch. It was less than half an hour before Riffs would be getting back from his massage appointment, just enough time to drive down to Kiwanis Park, read her the fucking riot act, and get my ass back to the house.

“Come on,” I said, and moved toward my souped-up hearse.

“Where we going?”

“Just come.”

She smiled and nodded. “Anything you say, Daddy.” Jennifer got into the hearse. I started it and I pulled into the street, the tires

squealing against the curb.

“Where we going, Girth?” Jennifer 8 repeated.

“We’re going to scare the *shit* out of that girl,” I said.

“What? *Now?*” She slipped a hand under the gearshift and grabbed mine.

“It never fucking ends. Every time I turn around, it’s something new—and with the exception of her straddling me, none of it’s pretty.”

“This isn’t a good idea, Girth.”

“Fuck that. I’m tired of being the understanding sex cauldron. I have Margo to think about.”

“I’m asking you, man: Please turn around.”

“Woman’s going to be the death of me!” I said. I was seething by this time, and I began to mimic her: “I want to grow as a person, Girth, like your organ grows. I want to find myself the way I found you. I’m tired of everyone seeing me as Girth McDürchstein’s sex doll. I’m tired of living in your shadow.”

“Girth, *please.*”

“You want to know how crazy it got?” I said, ignoring him. “There was a time when I came by Fred’s to take her in the back room. She says, ‘Girthy, I want to do something a little different this time. I heard a song you play live, and I want you to show me how it’s done on Melrose.’ She was talking about this S&M song we do, ‘Melrose Sickie Kicks,’ and you know, I think she missed the point of that song because it’s basically about how horrible and sca-

ry all that shit can be.

“So anyways, she takes me to this new room I never seen before—it has this big green door, like that porno, and she pulls it open. Inside it’s pretty dark—just some dull red lights, like embers from a dying fire. I can sort of make out glints of metal on the wall, implements of torment. Before I know it, Tatalía shoved me on the bed violently and without remorse. She yanked me over on my back, leaped on me, and she was holding a big, bloody scourge—”

“What’s a scourge?”

“It’s like a whip, but, like, a bouquet of them.”

Jennifer 8 looked confused.

“Never mind. I begged to know, ‘Who’s blood is that?’ because I know Dave, another one of her regulars, is poz. She wouldn’t tell me—she just slammed it against my chest. It hurt like hell, but I became numb to it as soon as her lithe brown body started to move, like a charmed snake.

“She tried out all kinds of things—nails, scalpels, this big wood thing tied behind my neck—and I just let her because she was rocking my cock so hard. Later, I had to go to the emergency room and have a dove remov—I had some problems I needed to see a doctor about, let’s say. I didn’t know what got into her. I’d never seen her like that before or since.”

“That’s fucked up, man,” Jennifer 8 said. Her erect nipples told a different story.

“Tell me about it!” I said. I glanced over at her. She looked

both terrified and exhausted, like her sweet treasures had just been plundered in an alley. “Relax girl,” I said. “I’m just going to talk to the girl. And it’ll be quick, as usual. Riffs and I are going to Chicago *tonight*.”

“I shouldn’t have told you,” Jennifer 8 whispered.

“No, Jen. You did the right thing. This is exactly what I needed—something to shake me up. This shit’s been eating away at me forever, and it’s got to stop. I want to get on with my fucking life. I’ve got to get this under control.”

“You should let the pimps handle it.”

“Fuck the pimps. You know what street hustlers are? They are the scum of the earth. Preying on people at their weakest and most vulnerable. I know. I’ve given those scumbags a million dollars already!”

“Maybe they owe *you*, then.” She slid her hand on my thigh.

“Maybe they do,” I said, winking at her, “but first, I’m going to take care of this myself.”

We were at Kiwanis Park by then, where the street circles around the baseball diamond. I jogged left a few yards, then made a hard left onto Lambros to make the right on Front Street. Her condo was a few houses away, an ugly building, mostly brown, with three little three-floor condos sandwiched together. As we passed, I slowed down. I kept going, though. I took a right on Hartman and circled back around, parking in front of what looked like a small apartment building. I cut the engine and looked dead ahead at the

condos. It was so quiet it kind of spooked me. I looked at Jennifer 8 again. She seemed pretty glum.

“Which one’s her place?” she asked.

I pointed it out.

“I don’t like this,” she said. “Let’s go fuck at your motel.”

“Later.”

“What if she’s with someone?”

“She better not be,” I said. “Not on my payroll.”

I reached into the coffin bay for the black leather face-mask, studded with steel ball-bearings, Tatalía had given me as a gift on the occasion of our one-month anniversary. I also had a pair of black leather driving gloves. I slipped into them.

“What the fuck are you doing, man?” Jennifer 8 said. “You look like a burglar.”

“Good,” I said. I reached under the seat for my Dancing Lady. It was a very nice dagger, over one hundred and fifty years old, which was designed for gutting sheep. It had a blade that looked almost wobbly, which is why they called it Dancing Lady. I kept it on hand for the crazies. Los Angeles is *full* of crazies. “Nice, huh?” I said, showing it to Jennifer 8. “Check out that blade.”

“Put that shit back,” she snapped. “You go in there and talk to the girl if you have to, but you’re not taking a goddamn knife with you.”

She snatched it out of my hand, pissed.

“You’ve got to relax, Jen,” I said. I slipped my fingers up her

dress and spent several minutes helping her to relax. When her squeal turned into a breathless sigh and I felt her convulse, I opened the door, got out of the hearse, and stole along the darkened residential street.

All three of the condos had their own entry, off Front Street, and they each had a back gate off the U-shaped Hartman Street, but Tatalía's back gate was broken. It was tied to the latch with a twist-tie, and the gate opened if you gave it a little push. I must have told her a million times—"Please get the goddamn gate fixed!"—but I guess I didn't pay her enough for that. I slipped past the gate, into the narrow courtyard, and moved toward the front door, and right away I noticed lights flickering in the windows. I moved past the front door to take a closer look. Candles burned inside, and I could hear faint music playing. I knew now that Tatalía expected a John. I wondered who she'd be fucking *this* time. I wondered if maybe Blondell was coming over with some of her boy-toys so that they could all get wild and dirty *with my money softening her mattress*.

Just as I was beginning to get seriously steamed, the back gate squeaked open. A guy came walking through like he owned the fucking place. He saw me and froze. He was young and good looking, with brown skin and a thick head of black hair, and I tried to place him, but I'd never seen him before. I didn't even know his name: Estebán Consuelas.

"Who the fuck are you?" I said.

“*Lo siento*,” he said politely, then struggled with the rest, thinking about each word and sounding it out carefully: “I come for return this.” He raised an object in his hand. I caught it glinting off a nearby streetlight—Juana Domínguez’s prized gold-plated thong.

“Really?” I could feel my nostrils flaring. “Just returning it, huh?”

“Sí,” he said. “*Señorita* Juana forget at restaurant. I... *limpia* de tables *a la* Zimorino’s Red Pies.”

“So it’s *Juana*, is it? You’re on a first-name basis with Juana?”

At that moment, the gate behind Consuelas squeaked again. Jennifer 8 walked into the narrow space. She held the Dancing Lady. “Everything cool here?” she asked. “I saw this guy walking through the gate, and I just wanted to make sure there wasn’t going to be any trouble.”

“This motherfucker wants me to believe he’s here dropping off *Juana*’s gold-plated thong,” I said, pointing to it in his hands.

“I do,” Consuelas said, appearing increasingly nervous. He held up the gaudy undergarment. “*Mira*.”

“And then what?” I asked. “You were going back to the restaurant?”

“No, *señor*,” he said. “My shift *es*... over. I leave *oro y voy a mí casa*.”

“You expect me to believe that?”

Consuelas shrugged in confusion and apathy. “Who expect? I say truth.”

“You fucking liar!” I shouted. “¡Mentiroso!”

“No, no!” Consuelas exclaimed. “*Dios mío, no miento.*”

“She’s got candles burning inside. Fucking music playing. Probably a nice bottle of Thunderbird on the counter, waiting for you.”

“No, no,” Consuelas protested.

“Fuck you, *hombre!* You think I’m fucking stupid or something?!”

“*Sí, pero—*”

Suddenly the front door opened. Tatalía came outside, alerted by our raised voices. She wore a tit-raising bra. Sheer, gauzy fabric hung down in a vague halo, revealing in slightly tanned detail her gorgeously sculpted abs, hips, and legs. Her pubic bush, trimmed into a thin rectangle with alarming perfection, seemed to mock me, screaming, *Remember when you used to feel my scruffy warmth against your face? Those days are over, fat boy!* Her mouth fell open in shock. She looked at me, and she looked at Consuelas, and she looked at Jennifer 8, just beyond. Consuelas was pretty well trapped. Jennifer stood between him and the rear gate, and I barred his way to the front.

“Girth, what the fuck is going on?”

I turned to look at Tatalía. I breathed in her large, doe-like brown eyes, her taut jawline and cheekbones you could grate cheese on, the tumble of black hair streaming down her brown back. “That’s what I want to know,” I said, hoping she didn’t notice the

crack in my voice.

Nicky, the dog, came wandering out of the house. He saw me and wagged his tail, then he saw Consuelas and also wagged his tail. I looked at Consuelas, steamed, and Jennifer 8 moved closer, the Dancing Lady still in her hand. I think she sensed that she might need to do some dancing of her own, because I was very close to losing it.

“I’m listening, motherfucker!” I said to Consuelas.

“Girth!” Tatalía shrieked. “Leave him the fuck alone! What are you doing here, anyway? I thought you were going to Chicago.”

“Fuck you,” I said.

“Eh, *los locos*,” said Consuelas. “*No necesito hablar a las mujures con—*”

Jennifer piped in, “Let’s just get the fuck out of here, Girth.”

“I asked you a question, motherfucker. What are you doing here? You delivering drugs?”

“Leave him alone, Girth!” Tatalía shouted, firm breasts heaving.

“I hear half you assholes are dealing on the side,” I said.

Tatalía came after me, swinging another bloodied scourge. I remember taking the time to think about how they kept getting blood on them before she swung at me. “Get the fuck out of here!” she roared as a blow landed on my shoulder. I yelped with pain. “This is my house and I can do what I want!”

“Not with my money, you can’t!”

“Fuck you!”

“No, fuck *you*. I gave you everything you could ask for, and you fucked it all up.”

She came at me like a banshee, all arms and scourges, flailing, and I ducked and she lost her balance and fell against the stoop. She fell hard on her right side—I could hear the back of her head hitting the ground—and lay there for a moment, not moving.

“Jesus Christ, Girth, let’s get the fuck out of here!” Jennifer 8 said, the seductive qualities sapped from her voice, leaving only the pleas of a tired, innocent girl.

I looked over at Consuelas, and I was fuming. I guess he thought I was going to hit him, because he raised his arms over his head and crooked one leg in the air—the Crane. “What the fuck is that?” I said. “You think you can take me with your karate shit?” He started circling me, bobbing and weaving, and if I hadn’t been so fucking angry I would have peed on his face. Instead I stared into his beady black eyes, flickering in the candlelight. He was serious, but I had no fear of this tiny little—

“Girth, come *on!*” It was Jennifer again, whining.

Tatalía moaned, regaining consciousness. She stirred on the ground and opened her eyes and looked at me, but it didn’t seem like anything was registering.

Jennifer 8 walked over and planted herself in front of me, blocking my view. “We are fucking *done* here, man—let’s go!”

I noticed the Dancing Lady in Jen’s hand, and in one deft

move I removed my right glove and snatched it up. "We're not going anywhere," I said, turning to face Consuelas. Consuelas was still circling me, bobbing and weaving, but I didn't feel like laughing anymore.

"You think you're tough, motherfucker?" I said.

I could hear Jennifer 8 just behind me, saying something, urging me to get the fuck out of there, and at one point she even reached for me and tried to drag me away, her warm body pressing against me as tightly as she ever had before, but I shook her off, hard, and moved toward Consuelas. "Okay, motherfucker!" I said. "*¡Deseo ver sus cojones!*"

Consuelas snickered a little, and then something went horribly wrong, and I know *what* happened, but I can't tell you exactly *how*. I was still standing in Tatalía's courtyard, of course, but for a few moments I couldn't remember how I'd gotten there, when I'd arrived, or even why I was there. Then it came back to me, very slowly: the strip club—with gorgeous bucktoothed Chipper up on stage, writhing her heart out; me, playing guitar on the motel bed; Margo, angry, not answering her phone; Jennifer 8, stopping by the house to tell me some more ugly shit about Tatalía's behavior. Then what? The short, quick drive from the Mountain Valley to Kiwanis Park.

And now? I was standing in Tatalía's courtyard, in the dark, listening to the loud, rhythmic, accelerated beating of my own heart. I put my left hand to my heart and my shirt felt strangely

wet. I looked down at myself. For several moments, I couldn't get my mind around what I was seeing. The whole front of me was covered in blood, but it didn't compute. *Is this really blood?* I wondered. *And whose blood is it? Is it mine? Am I hurt?*

I was more confused than ever. *What the hell had happened here?* Then I remembered that Consuelas guy coming through the back gate, with Juana's thong, and I remembered hollering at him, and I remembered how our shouts had brought Tatalía to the door. . .

Tatalía. Jesus.

I looked down at her and saw her on the ground in front of me, curled up in a fetal position at the base of the stairs, not moving. Consuelas was only a few feet away, slumped against the bars of the fence. He wasn't moving either. Both he and Tatalía were lying in giant pools of blood. I had never seen so much blood in my life. It reminded me that, in addition to all this carnage, Tatalía had struck me with that blood-soaked scourge earlier. It didn't seem real, and none of it computed. *What the fuck happened here? Who had done this? And why? And where the fuck was I when this shit went down?*

It was like part of my life was missing—like there was some weird gap in my existence. But how could that be? I was standing right there. That was *me*, right?

I again looked down at myself, at my blood-soaked clothes, and noticed the Dancing Lady in my hand. Drenched with blood, dripping down to my hand and wrist and half of my right forearm. That didn't compute either. I wondered how I had gotten blood all

over my Dancing Lady, and I again asked myself whose blood it might be, when suddenly it all made perfect sense: This was just a dream. A very bad dream. Any moment now, I would wake up, at home, in my own bed, and start going about my day.

Then I heard a sound behind me and turned, startled. Jennifer 8 stood in the shadows, a few feet away, frozen like a deer in headlights. She was looking beyond me, at the bodies.

“Jennifer?” I called out. She didn’t answer. “Jen?” Still nothing.

I went over and stood in front of her and asked the same question I’d just asked myself. “Jennifer, what the fuck happened here?”

She looked up and met my eyes, but for several moments it seemed as if she didn’t really see me. “Are you listening to me?” I said. “I asked you what happened here.”

Jennifer 8 looked at me in a way I had seen a thousand times before: mouth hanging open, her breathing short and ragged. Usually this would prompt me to insert something into her, but it didn’t seem like a good idea this time. She shook her head from side to side, and in a voice that was no more than a frightened whisper, said, “Jesus Christ, Girth—what have you done?”

“Me?”

*What the hell was she talking about? I hadn’t done anything, or anyone—yet!*

I jumped at a sound behind me—a high-pitched, almost human wail. It was Nicky, the dog, circling Tatalía’s body, his big paws leaving prints in the wet blood. He lifted his snout and let

out another wail, and it sent chills up and down my spine. “Let’s get the fuck out of here,” I said.

I hurried toward the rear gate, and moved through it, with Jennifer 8 close behind, but I stopped myself before I crossed into the alley. Jen bumped into me and jumped back, startled. “What?” she said.

I didn’t answer. I was thinking about the shape I was in—I was thinking of all the *blood*. My shirt and pants were sticking to my skin. Even my shoes were covered in blood.

I turned and looked behind me, beyond Jennifer 8, and saw a track of bloody, tell-tale prints. “We’ve got to hide the fucking bodies,” I finally said.

Without even thinking about it, I lunged toward the smaller body of Estebán Consuelas and began to drag him by the legs, a bloody trail sliding behind him. “Pick him up! Help me get him to the hearse!” I said. At the time I didn’t realize the irony of transporting the corpses in a hearse. I lost my grip on the little Hispanic and fell to a crouch to lift him again. I noticed that my hands were shaking.

Jennifer 8 stood there all the while, mumbling, “Jesus Christ, Girth. Jesus Christ.” She just kept repeating herself, like she’d lost her goddamn mind or something.

“Will you shut the fuck up?!” I snapped. I grabbed Consuelas around the torso, like Richard Gere at the end of *An Officer and a Gentleman*, and hurried up the darkened street. Jennifer followed,

still mumbling. I shoved Estebán Consuelas haphazardly into the back of the hearse, squeezing him in between Riffs' half-stack and my gym-bag. "Jesus Christ, Girth," Jennifer 8 said. "Jesus Christ."

"WILL YOU SHUT THE FUCK UP!"

Jen recoiled, startled, and shut up.

"Help me get Tatalía."

She nodded obediently, and we rushed back as quietly as possible. She actually helped me this time—fortunate, because the combination of Tatalía's height and muscle made her much heavier than the tiny little beady-eyed mustachioed busboy—and we hoisted her up and ran awkwardly toward the hearse. There wasn't much room left in the back, so we shoved her in flat above the amps, where there was still some room. I got behind the wheel and Jennifer climbed into the passenger seat.

I started the hearse and pulled out, the tires squealing, and raced through the curved street toward Front Street. I made a right onto Front, then an immediate left onto Madison Street, then a left onto Broadway a block or two up, heading back toward the motel.

I glanced at Jennifer 8. She was hunched over, her elbows on her knees, her face buried in her hands.

"What happened back there, Jen?" I said.

She sat up. Her cheeks were wet with tears. I tried to see if her tight skirt revealed more wetness, but in the darkness I couldn't tell. She shook her head from side to side and shrugged.

I thought back to that horrific scene at the courtyard, and to

all the blood. I had never seen so much blood in my life. It didn't seem possible. It didn't seem real.

"Jennifer?"

She still didn't answer, but what the hell—this wasn't really happening. That hadn't been me back there. I'd imagined the whole thing. I was imagining it *then*. In actual fact I was at the motel in bed, asleep, having one of those crazy crime-of-passion dreams, which I often had and they often featured my hired companions, and I was going to wake up any second now. Yeah—that was it!

Only I didn't wake up.

We were still on Broadway, and I passed the light on Orange and made a sharp right into the motel, tearing through the parking lot, toward my room. I saw Little Riffs Nicky swimming nude in the pool and I remembered we needed to leave for Chicago ASAP.

I drove past the room, and past Riffs, and in the side-view mirror I saw him stop and look, dumbfounded. Riffs had probably been waiting outside my room, with my polished shoes, like he often did before we left town, and I wondered if he'd had the manager ring my room. I had no idea what time it was. I looked down at the cuckoo clock I had installed on the hearse's dash and saw it was 4:37. Fuck! If we wanted to get to Chicago before Sotheby's held that Cows on Parade auction, we needed to leave in eight minutes.

I pulled along an alley behind the motel and parked in the shadows beyond the motel lights. I needed to get into my room without being seen by Riffs, and I knew exactly how to do it.

I looked down at my lap, at my throbbing johnson, then over at Jennifer 8. “You’re going to have to help me out here, darlin’,” I said.

She turned to look at me. Once again, she gave me that familiar look of an open mouth and funny breathing. She couldn’t stop shaking her head. It looked like she was slipping into shock or something.

“Jennifer, are you listening to me?”

She stopped shaking her head for a moment, and nodded once, and I began to tell her what I needed from him. “Before I do anything, I gotta relax, and the way you keep looking at me...” I trailed off. “I need you—”

Jennifer 8 looked away, into the darkness beyond her own window, clearly not listening to me. I reached over and grabbed her by the hair, yanking her face down into my crotch, and unzipped my pants.

“Show me the path of enlightenment,” I whispered, stroking her hair softly to make up for yanking it just a moment ago.

She automatically did her thing, and I sat back, closed my eyes, and reveled in the technique, the warmth and wetness of her small mouth, the snake-like motions of her tongue. She seemed a little better when she finished; maybe that was just because I felt better.

I said, “I’m going to go to my room now. I know exactly what we need to do with the bodies. Just wait here until I’m back,

okay?”

She wiped her mouth and whispered, “Okay.”

I got out of the car and stole onto the motel’s property. My heart was beating like crazy. I could feel it pounding in my ears.

Once, when Riffs and I first started staying in the Mountain Valley Motel, I saw a place like a secret exit, behind the laundry room, where two custodians were sharing a joint. I crossed through the back parking lot, which smelled vaguely of ammonia and had the loud smells and steamy atmosphere that usually accompany the rear of a motel. I knew where to go—the door, painted the same red-orange as the brick wall, near the northwest edge of the motel.

From there, I snuck through the laundry room, waited for Riffs to try an underwater lap, then sprinted to my room. I went inside and fished through my suitcase for a pair of sunglasses. I found my reflectorized, rainbow-tinted aviator glasses—perfect.

Dashing back through the laundry room, I stopped and opened up all the driers. One of them had a bundle of clothes in them, both men’s and women’s. I grabbed a couple of things and ran back to the hearse. Jennifer 8 stood outside the car, next to it, hunched over, staring at a puddle of vomit she had made on the alley surface. I ignored her for the moment, pulled open the hearse’s rear door and yanked out the busboy by his feet. It took a few minutes to strip off his bloody shirt. His pants were soaked through, but they were black and it would be difficult to notice even in the buzzing fluorescents of the laundry room.

I replaced it with a Hawaiian shirt at least four sizes too big, festive and colorful, flopped a sailor hat carelessly on his head, and finally placed the sunglasses over his vacant eyes.

“Help me!” I whispered to Jennifer 8.

She gave me a look that I assume meant she wanted to go into my room and fool around. She was taking this murder thing better than I thought. I waggled my eyebrows at her suggestively, and she smiled and bent down next to me. Together, we hoisted Consuelas up as if he was standing, each of us linking our arms around his, and we floated him up and down as if he were bobbing instead of just dragging his lifelessly body on the ground.

We got through the laundry room without incident, but I was terrified about walking to the room and being seen by Riffs. I peered my head out of the laundry room door, and saw him treading water with one hand. I couldn't see the other, but I could tell he was staring down at his naked unit in the water and figured out what he was up to. He'd never see us.

I nodded my head to Jennifer 8, and we bobbed the body along the walkway to my room. We breathed heavy sighs of relief when we got inside. Jennifer helped me strip him nude, and we sat him in the Jacuzzi. I started it up, then shut his eyes and tilted his head back so it looked like he was digging the jets.

Jennifer 8 and I went back onto the walkway to find Riffs watching us from the pool. I gave him a friendly wave, and he nodded back. Jen looked ill, as she often did when Riffs made eye con-

tact with her.

Back at the hearse, we gently removed Tatalía. We stripped her down, and I took a moment to admire her naked body one last time. I asked Jennifer 8 to turn her head away, and ten minutes later, as I zipped my leather shorts back up, I told Jen to help me dress her. We put her into an old gray t-shirt that said “CASTLE-TON” and a pair of tight, form-hugging blue jeans. It got me going again, so another ten minutes passed before I finally put on the sunglasses and hoisted her up and started moving her toward the laundry room.

Tatalía was significantly heavier than Consuelas, but Jennifer 8 and I managed. I’m a little stronger than she is, so Tatalía looked a little lopsided, but it would be fine just to get her to the room. We turned the corner without looking—

—and nearly slammed into Little Riffs Nicky, who had not put on any clothes. He had an empty, plastic ice bucket crooked between his arm and his pasty waist.

“Hey, guys,” he said.

“Riffs!” I exclaimed, trying not to look terrified. “So good to see you!”

“Are we leaving?” he asked. “Or are these fine ladies giving you a fond farewell?” He took a moment to leer at Tatalía. “Hey baby, save some for daddy.” He clicked his teeth together.

Jennifer 8 improvised by forcing Tatalía’s lifeless arm forward. The hand slammed awkwardly against Riffs’ shoulder. He

rolled his eyes in ecstasy before I slapped the hand away.

“That’s enough!” I roared. “She’s mine!”

I was about to leap forward and take Riffs down when I realized that would cause Jen to collapse. Instead, I just gave him a dirty look. Riffs took another moment to drink in Jennifer 8, then brushed past us, slapping her on the ass, as he headed for the ice machine.

“That was close,” I said. Looking at Jennifer 8 again, I was concerned she might vomit again. Later, she told me she was merely repulsed by Riffs’ flaccid and undersized unit.

As we continued down the walk, I slammed against one of the air-conditioning units, making a racket, and almost fell down and dropped the body in the process. I clutched the body and kept moving, then let us into the room.

We stripped Tatalía down, and within fifteen minutes she was also in the Jacuzzi. I went back into my suitcase and found my stash. I shoved a fistful of cocaine into each of their mouths to make it look like a drug overdose (I hoped the coroner would overlook the multiple stab wounds), but by the time I finished I realized the water had turned a pink color. I dug into Riffs’ things and pulled out a few packets of Kool-Aid. I dumped them into the Jacuzzi, then tossed the packets aside where they would be found quickly.

The perfect crime.

I turned around, and Jennifer 8’s go-go dress lay in a heap at her feet. I admired her creamy deliciousness, and before I knew it I

had mounted her. I lost track of time, but it didn't seem like much had passed when Riffs barged into the room, with an enormously fat and foul-smelling woman trailing him. He apparently decided to have a fond farewell of his own. "Did you hear that?" he asked.

I collapsed on Jennifer 8's firm-yet-supple body, glared at Riffs, and sneered, "What?"

"That banging noise," he said.

"That was me," I said suavely, and winked at Jennifer 8. I felt Little Girth shrinking. So did Jen; with disappointment, she shoved me off her and headed for the bathroom.

"No," Riffs said. "A big thump, right outside Marla's room."

Marla grunted, and some of her Dorito-and-Arby's aroma drifted my way. I wrinkled my nose and threw the condom on the floor with all the others.

"What?" I said.

"That banging noise," he said. "A big thump out back, near the fence."

"I didn't hear shit," I said. "I was making sweet love with somebody in my weight class."

Marla scowled at me, and I could practically smell that, too.

"It was a really loud fucking noise, Girth. It scared the hell out of me."

Riffs seemed to think someone had been lurking outside Marla's room, possibly intending to rape her, and he asked me to have a look, so I humored him. We went off in separate directions, and af-

ter about a minute, I saw him on the deck of the pool wrapped up in a blanket of feminine fat, going at it like a steed.

“I didn’t see anything,” I said, trying not to look directly at the mess of flesh.

“You got a flashlight?” Riffs asked.

“Jesus, Riffs—we gotta get the hell out of here. You go look for it and meet me in the car when you’re done.”

Riffs finished up and, still spooked, followed Marla back into her room. I went into my room to get my things. Jennifer 8 was still in the bathroom.

“I’m leaving!” I shouted through the door. “Are you feeling all right?”

“I’ve been better.” I could barely hear her through the door.

“Do you need more of the good stuff?”

“Not tonight.”

“It’s your last chance until we come back through Missoula, in more ways than one.”

“See you then.”

I sighed and, after spending a little while rubbing myself against the door to entice her out, got the rest of my belongings and went out to the car. There was still blood everywhere, so I had to be careful where I set it. I knew Riffs wouldn’t notice, but if he did, I’d just tell her Jennifer 8 and Tatalía were on their periods. He’d believe it.

After awhile, he came and joined me in the car. All he had on

him in the first place was a leather jacket supposedly worn by Bruce Springsteen, so he didn't need to pack. We took off and got onto to Interstate 90 headed east, toward Chicago.

"Man," I told Riffs. "It feels like I spend my whole life racing to and from big cities and getting on and off stages and women."

"I know what you mean," Riffs sighed.

By the time we got to Billings, the sun had come up. I turned on my portable, which in those days I didn't keep on because they didn't have as good of batteries as they do now, and found I had VoiceMails. I listened to it.

"Tatalía has been killed." A hoarse whisper, vaguely Spanish. This was all the message said. I deleted it. The next one said, "Mr. McDürchstein, this is Detective Gregson with the Missoula County Sheriff's Department. We'd like you to know that a ritualistic killing took place in the motel room you checked out of six hours ago. We've learned you were quite"—he cleared his throat—"intimate with a, um, Tatalía Domínguez. We thought you should know: She has been killed."

"Do you have any leads?" I asked.

"Um," Detective Gregson said suspiciously.

I cleared my throat. "What I mean to say is—killed? What do you mean, killed?"

And the cop said, "Girth, we can't tell you. But we can tell you that her menagerie of women is all right. Where are you?"

"I'm in Billings," I said.

“I need you to come back to Missoula as soon as you can,” he said.

Much later, during the trial, the prosecution made a big deal about my response to the phone call, claiming that I never bothered to ask what happened to Tatalía, and suggesting that I didn’t because I already knew. But that’s not the way I remember it. When I was told that Tatalía was dead, my first response was the one I just noted: “*Killed? What do you mean, killed?*” And even when though I knew exactly what had happened to her, I remember asking, “What happened? What the fuck happened?”

The cop repeated himself: “We can’t say anything. We’re still investigating.”

And I said, “And the fine, fine ladies of Fred’s Lounge are all right?”

And the cop said, “Yes. As I said, the women are fine. We need you to come back now, Girth.”

“Jesus Christ,” I said. “That’s all you’re going to say: *Come back now!*”

“*Girth,*” the cop replied. “We’ll tell you what we know when you get here. We don’t know much ourselves. We’ll be waiting for you at the Mountain Valley Motel.”

I went nuts, and I remember screaming at him—begging him not to leave me in the dark—but it didn’t help. When it became clear that the cops had nothing else to say—either because they didn’t want to share anything with me, or because they didn’t

know much—I wanted to slam the phone down, but I couldn't. It was a cellular phone. All I could do was stab at the DISCONNECT button, which doesn't have the same dramatic impact.

I called my A&R person and second-in-command at Kelleystein, Karen Hofstadt, and told her what was going on. "I just heard from the cops," I said. "They told me Tatalía is dead."

"*Dead?*" she said, then sighed. "You've really done it this time."

"But this time I'm innocent! I swear!"

I told her to call the L.A. cops and get hold of Margo, and asked her to please get me a flight out of the country—perhaps to Finland, where women kiss my feet and other parts.

I made a few more calls. I called the hotel we had booked in Chicago to make sure they'd have a box of Piru Paska waiting. I knew I'd need a strong laxative after the events of last night. I tried calling the cops again, and I called the Domínguezes, down in Missoula.

Tatalía's sister, Cherelle, got on the phone, hysterical. "You brutal son of a bitch!" she hollered. "She asked you to act out sickie kicks again and you killed her! I know you killed her, you mother-fucker!"

Juana took the phone from her, but I couldn't understand what she was saying. It was entirely in Spanish. I told her I was turning back around to Missoula, and that I'd speak to her as soon as we got there. I kept going east, though. I knew what I had to do.

I tried calling Karen again to ask if she had booked that

flight. She gave me the information and said everything I needed would be waiting for me at the Irving Hotel when we arrived in Chicago.

I punched the gas and saw a sign that said BISMARCK – 389.

Riffs was looking at me the whole time. “What’s going on, Girth?”

“Nothing, man.”

I got a phone call. It was the detective again. “When can I expect you?”

“We just got out of Billings, so it’ll probably be late this evening.”

I heard a grunt. Then: “That’s fine, Mr. McDürchstein, but as a service to you *and* us, we’ll send a police escort to ensure you arrive as quickly as possible.”

I rolled down the window and spat onto the hard concrete. “Not if I can help it,” I said into the phone, then hung up.

I readied the nitrous boosters. The first time I saw a State Police car, I let them rip.

Riffs and I hit the border in less than ninety minutes. I was officially a fugitive from justice. Riffs was an accessory after the fact, although I found out later he was also charged with statutory rape. Apparently Marla, ravaged by the horrors of an unhealthy lifestyle, looked much older than her twelve years of age.

We slept in the car and got to Chicago a few days later. I was ready to board that plane.

If it had only been that easy...