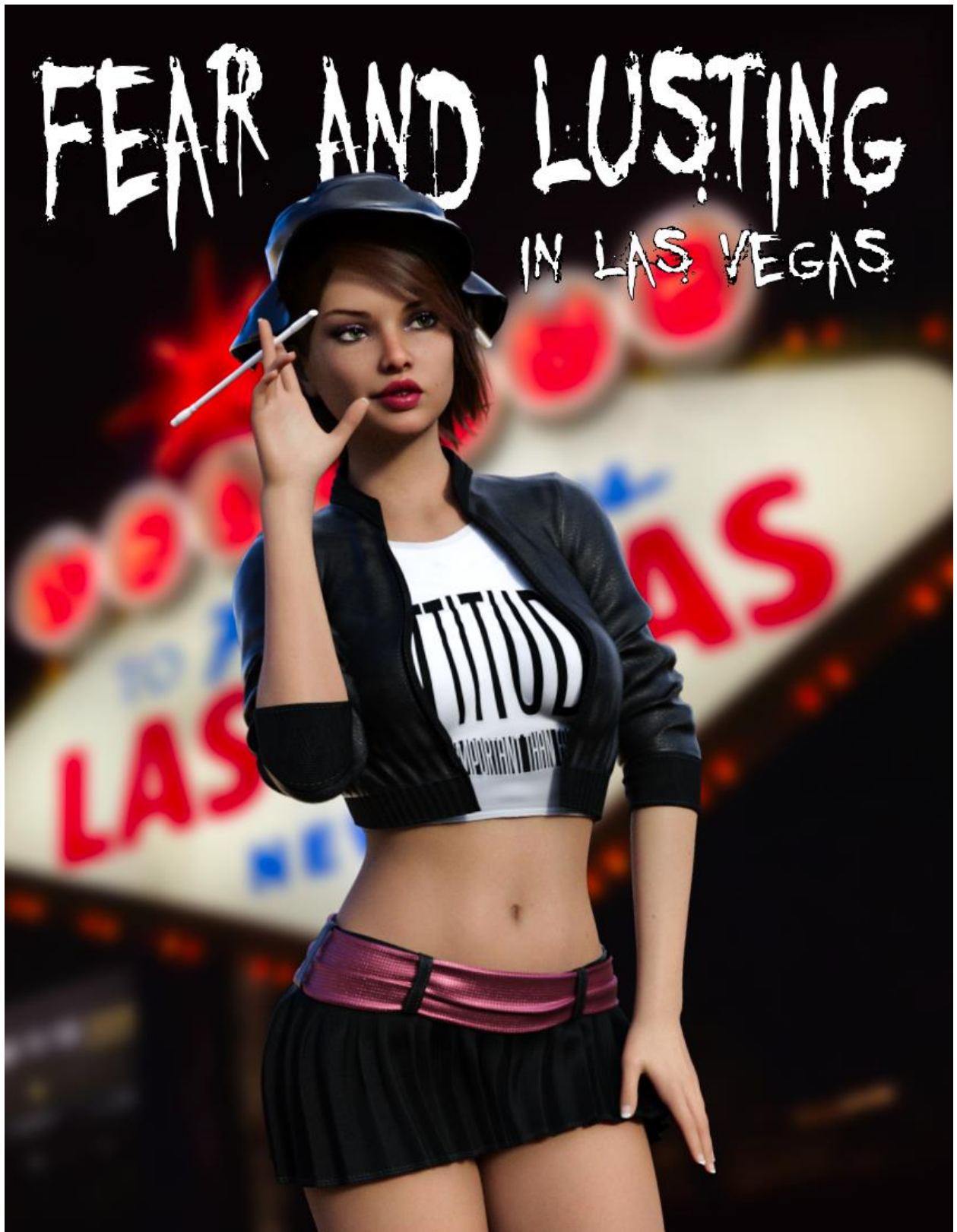


FEAR AND LUSTING IN LAS VEGAS



Fear And Lust In Las Vegas

by Cooper

There is nothing more depraved than beer drunk Southern Baptists on a tear in Las Vegas. Nothing. Spending most of the year wearing pants that are three sizes too small in the crotch area, married to frigid women with bee-hive hairdos on their heads-- and in their skirts-- pounding Bibles and burning crosses, these hypocrisy-drenched Jesus freaks come to Vegas once a year, hit the Casinos and make Jim Morrison look like Jim Baker.

Let these guys--married to their perennially pregnant, puffy, ugly women get a look at a lean, hungry show girl with legs as long as the Vegas strip, and they go apeshit with a righteous vengeance.

I know what I'm talking about, man. I've seen it. Here's the story.

I, Raoul Duke, had returned to Vegas with my attorney, Doctor Gonzo, for the first time since my famous visit to cover the law enforcement convention I'd written about in Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas. I'd thought that first visit was a bad trip, and it was, but even it, with its waves of paranoia, tremulous stirrings of fear and loathing, and Nixonesque manifestations of high-grade linoleum, was nothing compared to the descent of the Bible beaters.

We watched them for a day, quoting the scripture as they ran their hands up the thighs of some very choice showgirls. We were disgusted by the scene, but too fascinated to stop watching it. "Thou shalt submit to the authority of thy husband!" they'd scream while shoving a dollar bill into a rhinestone studded g-string. "Love, honor and obey!" they'd howl as they shoved their faces into a dancing girl's jiggling chest.

"Jesus sayeth, do unto others as you would have them do," Doctor Gonzo murmured, reaching into his pocket and taking out the small silver container where he kept his cocaine. He poured a little into his palm, snorted and licked his hand, passing the container to me.

"Sure," I said, turning my head to one side like a demented parrot. "Why not?"

It seemed like the only way we would ever get through this bad scene was to do massive drugs, but just then it got worse. Most of these Bible freaks seem to have serious hair fetishes-they fondle women's hair the way most guys fondle their bodies. They love to bury their heads in it, almost submerge themselves into it. Maybe it's because they only got laid once every nine months or so-their brood queens only submit to sex for the purpose of procreation after all. Or maybe it was the big hair sported by their gum chewing wives and mothers.

Who knew?

But they were into hair so deep that it was almost mystical. Almost, but not quite. Like their devotion of Jesus, their hair-fetish fell just short of mystical and instead became completely and totally repulsive.

And if you're starting to think I'm anti-religious, back off. I don't believe in toga-toga myself, but I can respect someone who believes in something and lives his or her life according to the rules, but what I can't stand is someone who will beat, rob, enslave and kill people in the name of the Prince of Peace. Southern Baptists, man. They're lethal.

Wait. I was talking about their hair fetish. It was just as the mescaline was starting to take effect and the world was starting to look right-warped to me, that these crazy freaks dragged one of the girls from the stage, held her down and-- cut her hair off. This act was an offense of many levels, not the least of which was that it blew my high.

There are worse things you can do to a woman while holding her down, but cutting her hair off is pretty heavy. Especially if she's a girl who makes a living off her looks. Dr. Gonzo reached into his jacket and pulled out a glittering, six-inch Bowie knife.

"Christ," I said, "where did you get that big fucker?"

"It doesn't matter," he said. "All that matters is that I am going to use it to cut the fucking balls off that bastard."

I held up my hand. "An excellent idea, but let's be a little more subtle."

"What the hell do you mean?"

By now, the Baptists, carrying the bundle of the girl's hair out of the room like a trophy, were stumbling down the hall singing "Old time religion". The girl, crying hysterically, was being comforted by the other dancers. The music had stopped. The DJ was shaking his fists at the retreating freaks, shouting threats, but they were too high on Jesus-juice to pay him any mind.

I turned back to Dr. Gonzo. "Remember our old friend, Dr. Jackie the ball-crusher?"

"Yeah, I remember her. So what?"

"How about if we enlist her and really teach these holy rollers a lesson they won't forget?"

Dr. Gonzo thought about it for a minute. "Sounds good, but only one thing."

"What?"

"Let's go upstairs and drop some of that Snoopy acid first."

It seemed right and just to me, so I agreed. "But only," I insisted, "after I have another beer."

A half dozen cans of Ballantine's later-plus a hit of Snoopy acid-and I was ready to call Dr. Jackie. I was starting to feel good again, normal, and I couldn't think of anything that would make my weekend complete like watching Dr. Jack unleash some of her truly vicious drugs onto those hair-loving weasels. After all, there's only one thing to do when you run into a bunch of raving hypocrites on a sex and roulette tear through Vegas- and that's fix it so they only prayer they know is "Oh God" and the only time they say it is when they are flat on their backs with their legs spread wide.

Oh wait. Did I say that was the only thing? I should have said that's the final thing, but before that, you do some major skull-fucking with the miserable bastards.

Putting another cigarette into my cigarette extender and lighting up, I dialed the number. As usual, Dr. Jack picked up the phone but said nothing. She never uttered the first word. "Dr. J," I said, "Hunter."

"So the hell what?"

Sweet as always. "I'm here in Vegas. Twisted shit going down. Southern Baptists drinking, gambling and whoring."

"Yeah? So what's unusual about that?"

Not much, I had to admit, but I went on. "They grabbed a showgirl, held her down and cut her damn hair off," I said. "Sick bastards."

"I'm on my way," Dr. J said slamming down the phone. The line went dead, but I listened for another few seconds. It sounded to me like I could hear a voice in the white noise, a lost,

lonely voice calling out for redemption. "Tricky Dick," I shouted with sudden recognition. "What the hell are you doing on my line?"

"I am not a spook," Nixon said. "Write a book about me Hunter. Make people love me again."

"Just hold on a second," I said. "I'll need a notepad and a pen to take notes."

I set the phone down on the table on its side and went to get another blotter of Snoopy. It was all gone. I looked over at Dr. Gonzo, who was slumped low in his chair, watching an episode of "Three's Company." Jack Tripper was wearing a dress, insisting to his landlord that he was gay. Dr. Gonzo was fish-eyed, his lips looked blue. "What the hell was that all about?" He asked.

"Nixon," I said, "looking for redemption."

"Good," Gonzo said, groaning as he got up from the chair. "I'll go talk to him."

I grabbed my fly-swatter and hit him on the head as he passed. "You ate all the acid; you fat bastard."

Dr. Gonzo grunted. "As your attorney, I advise you to take a hit from the little black bottle on the nightstand."

"What is it?" I asked.

"Estrogenochrom."

"Holy shit," I said getting the bottle. "You can only get this..."

"From the ovaries of a living virgin," Gonzo finished for me. "Don't take too much."

I took the eyedropper out, filled it with the silver liquid and, turning my head back like a baby bird waiting to be fed by its mother, dripped it into my open mouth. It stung my tongue like a lightning bolt, bursting through my body and seeming to explode out of every pore. I collapsed to the ground experiencing a female orgasm for the second time in my life as visions of Jungian female passion flashed wildly through my mind. I saw huge, muscled men with the heads of bulls chasing me through dark, twisted forests, Satyrs blowing on their pipes while I thrashed-- my body smooth, slender and naked in the lightning charged rain. I saw myself as an Indian Princess in a cold, shallow stream, laying on my back while the water burst all around me, the river's waters boiling with homebound salmon. I was a bronze, full-breasted beauty, the golden firelight glistening off my sweat-slick belly as I ground my hips slowly to the music of drums and tambourines and tribal warriors in animal masks knelt prostate before my beauty.

When I came to, it was morning. Dr. Gonzo was still talking to Nixon. "But then why didn't you just come out and admit it you old dirty bastard?" Gonzo shouted. "What the hell is wrong with the truth?"

What, indeed, I wondered, is wrong with the truth? Only that if we ever really faced it this whole shitty civilization we've built on lies, double-talk and denial would go up in flames? Could we really operate in a world of truth, I wonder, or is all too terrifying to imagine that somewhere, just below the surface of even the straightest man in the world, is a primal female ready to explode? Would we ever want to admit that the violence we direct at the women of the world is really violence directed at the women within ourselves?

Are we secretly jealous of their wombs, their ability to create in their bellies what we can only destroy?

I lurched across the room and grabbed blindly for a bottle of rum, dumping it into a hotel room tumbler and slamming it down viciously, enjoying the feeling of it burning my throat.

"Hunter!"

I spun around to see Dr. J sitting in a chair by the window. Her hair had grown gray, but it still hung down past her shoulders and she still had that body. She was never the kind of woman you think must secretly wish she were a man; she was the kind of woman that not so secretly wished she could find a man who was worthy of her. "Dr. J." I said, pouring myself another glass a whiskey. "How long have you been here?"

"Long enough to hear you murmuring under the effects of this." She held the bottle of Estrogenochrome in her velvet-gloved hands.

"Shit," I said, taking another drink. "My cover's blown."

"It was blown years ago," she said. "But don't feel too bad. You aren't any different from the rest of the male population."

"Balls," I responded. "The hell I ain't. I'm a doctor of journalism."

"Let's get to work."

I grabbed my tape recorder and followed her out the door. Dr. Gonzo was now shouting at Nixon. "You said you had a secret plan to get us out of Vietnam, man. And if you hadn't smeared his running mate McGovern would have kicked your ass!"

"What's the plan?" I asked, chasing behind Dr. J.

She pulled a big sheet of blotter acid out of her old fashioned doctor's bag-it was the kind of small, black leather bag doctors used to carry back when they made house calls.

"We'll start with this."

I took a look at the sheet. It was Ranma acid. "Serious shit," I said around the cigarette extender still clenched in my mouth even though the cigarette had burned out. "Could be a show."

"No could be about it," Dr. J. said. "You want a hit?"

"Later," I answered in a rare fit of self-discipline. "I want to get all this down."

We decided to start with the preacher and work our way down. The Bible-beaters had just gone to bed after a night full of whoring and gambling. Their leader was another doctor, though his doctor of divinity had come from a shack in the Tennessee mountains that claimed to be a seminary. He was known as The Right Reverend Billy Fountain, and we found him asleep, sandwiched between two naked chorus girls. Both of his heads were between their knees.

Dr. J tore off a piece of blotter acid and shoved it into his mouth. "Stand back," she said, but there wasn't any explosion. Instead, The Right Reverend merely disentangled himself from between the two chorus girls, stood up and went to the bathroom. When he came back out, he was staring greedily at the skimpy clothes the girls had been wearing. He walked over to the chair where the clothes were strewn, picked up a glittering bikini top, and held it dangling in his hands, lips trembling. "What devil has possessed me?" he whispered in horror, even as he slipped the tiny piece of fabric over his shoulders and reached back to tie it on.

"Surely, this is an act of Old Satan," he hissed as he slipped into a g-string, wiggling his hips to get it all the way on. Finally, he slipped into a pair of heels, seemed to shiver and then, raising his hands in the air, began to snap his fingers as he swayed out the door and began to go room from room waking up the blurry-headed evangelicals. "It's the dawning of a

brand new day," he shouted, stomping his heeled feet on the floor. "I call you unto me to be reborn!"

I was more than stunned by the reaction of the preacher's "saintly" following. Instead of the shocks of horror I'd expected, they all jeered and laughed. I did hear a few cry out "praise Jesus!" And "great day in the morning!" I looked at Dr. J. She shrugged.

"I guess the preacher has done this before."

He led the whole hell-blasted horde back down to the bar. A few all-night drinkers looked up in stunned amusement to see g-string clad Rev Billy Fountain come dancing into the bar, climb up on the stage and start swinging. The girls giggled, but they kept shaking their stuff. This was Vegas, after all.

Dr. J began to grab her targets one by one and feed them the acid. The next was Deacon Kirkpatrick. She slipped him a hit of blotter acid. He immediately began to sprout a pair of milk heavy breasts. "Oh my God," he said, cupping the heavy growths through his shirt even as milk stained the fabric dark. "I've got to find a baby to feed." He stumbled off into the hotel, looking for a way to satisfy his new and uncontrollable maternal urges.

One by one the people found themselves physically and/or mentally feminine. Some men with plain black pants and white, button-down shirts were in corners applying make-up to their now smooth, beardless faces.

Formerly crew-cut guys in stiff white shirts and ties were braiding each other's flowing, shoulder length hair, giggling and gossiping like school girls. Two had found themselves with killer legs and had joined Billy Fountain onstage, while another had found himself with an aching need between his legs and had gone out in search of someone to make him a mother.

Two of the strippers had stopped dancing. One was sitting at a table, helping some of the clumsy boys with their make-up, while another was sitting at the bar with a crescent of the fellows gathered around her cooing sympathetically as she told them about her problems with her boyfriend. The third was still onstage, but she was giving dance lessons to The Reverend and a few other attentive men who were all step, step, kick, kicking while Steve Goodman sings:

In the pursuit of true love's joys
Boys will be girls and girls will be boys
But sometimes it's hard to know what to do
When you don't know what you're talking to

Everyone had started drinking frozen daiquiris and pina colodas through straws. The regular drinkers had all left. The Bible-belters had taken over. It went on like that for hours as the fellows sipped sweet drinks, danced and gossiped with the strippers. Finally, sometime after noon they all started feeling hungry and decided to walk down the street and get something to eat at a lounge one of the dancers recommended. The strippers took them back stage where skimpy fragments of costumes were kept and all the guys donned boas, tiaras, high-heeled shoes, fishnet stockings and whatever else they could find and wear. On the way to the restaurant, they decided they would evangelize, so they went back to their rooms and grabbed boxfuls of pamphlets and miniature copies of the New Testament to pass out.

The crowds were amused and horrified at the sight of these stoned drag queens scattered about on the sidewalk passing out conservative Christian literature while Reverend Billy, the rhinestones on his bikini top glittering in the afternoon sunshine, shouted out--from appropriately crimson glossed lips-- fire and brimstone, insisting that the lord would smite all the heathens and sinners in "this modern day Sodom." One street preacher, looking for all the world like he'd been trapped in a time capsule since 1950 with his crew cut, starched white shirt and thick black glasses, tried to shout Billy down, saying "you are an abomination unto the Lord! Man shall not dress in the garb of women lest his soul be damned!"

This caused Billy to hesitate for a moment. Somewhere under the haze of the Ranma acid that old bastard was dying inside and the words seemed to reach him because a troubled

look came over his face, but he was too far gone and suddenly shouted back "Jesus had long hair and wore a dress. If it's good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for me."

This provoked cries of outrage from other evangelicals, and policemen had to be called. No one is allowed to disrupt the flow of people on The Strip in Vegas, anything that might make them stop spending for even an instant is the greatest evil, and so all were ordered to move on or face prosecution for loitering. The Reverend Billy Fountain, high-stepping like a majorette, led the boys clattering off as they sang "Onward Christian Soldiers" at the top of their lungs, a vision rarely seen in or outside of Vegas in my estimation. For better or for worse.

I turned to one of the pig-eyed street preachers who'd been shouting at Billy. I'd seen him spit on one of the boys. "Hell of a sight," I said.

"What's American coming to when people like that are allowed into church?" He spat viciously.

"Damn straight, man," I said. "Politicians and lawyers are one thing, but cross-dressers, that's hell."

"Hell, yes" he said. "Guys like you are a dying breed."

I only wish guys like him were a dying breed, but from where I sit guys like him seem to be multiplying by the minute. How can people like that be allowed into church, he'd asked. How can people like him, I wonder, be allowed out? When he looked at Billy and company he saw sinners on their way to hell, what I saw were sinners sashaying their way toward whatever possibility of salvation existed in this world. But I didn't say anything. What would be the point.

"Come on Hunter?" Dr. J had snapped me out of my reverie. She was heading back toward the hotel.

"Shouldn't we stay with them?" I was watching the mass of Billy's boys filing into a restaurant down the way.

"We have to get ready for when the Ranma acid really kicks in."

Dr. J had her own room across the hall from mine. "Dress like a preacher," she said. "They will be looking for male guidance soon. I'll come get you."

Unlocking the door to my own room, I went inside, surprised by the scent of floral perfume that hung heavy in the air like spring pollen. The radio was playing loud, echoing out of the bathroom, and as I pulled the door shut, sneezing against the perfume, I recognized the song. It was Dar Williams singing "When I was a boy."

Suddenly, I had a very strange feeling. I looked and saw that someone had been drinking very heavily from the bottle of Estrogenochrome. I also saw that someone had left behind some Ranma acid.

"Dr. Gonzo, are you here?"

"Back here," a high, pretty voice called from the bathroom.

I walked back listening to Dar Williams singing:

I don't know how I survived I guess I knew the tricks that all boys knew
And you can walk me home But I was a boy, too

My attorney was a swarthy man; I think he may have been Samoan. He had also had issues with women. I was not surprised when I turned the corner to the bathroom and found him

at the big outer sink, his pink mouth open as he carefully used a pencil to trace a line under his electric green eyes. He was wearing a tight red dress that perfectly emphasized every curve of his now ruthlessly female body, and as my eyes caught the sight of him there in that dress with silky stockings on his rounded, tone legs, I immediately wanted to jump him. It wasn't just that he was now gorgeous, it was something else.

There are times when I look at a woman and I get the feeling that she is primed, totally primed for sex. It's almost like her womb has taken over and is now running her brain, directing her to seek out a man, find him, and draw him into her web. I feel a hollow longing deep in my own belly at those times, almost as if the faint remnants of my own fetal womb are sympathizing with hers, making me feel an echo of her hunger even as my own male impulses whine and sputter their way into active mode.

I was a kid that you would like
Just a small boy on her bike
Riding topless down the street
I didn't care who saw

As soon as he finished with his eyeliner, Dr. Gonzo turned, put a hand to his hip and said, "How do I look."

"Disturbing," I answered.

"Good," he said sassily, pushing past me and going back into the main room. I couldn't help but take a look at his cute, twitching tush as he walked away. He stopped to slip into a pair of heels, then proceeded across to the dresser where I saw he'd laid some things out.

I walked over to see what was there. The bright red package of female that stood radiating feminine hunger next to me now came to my shoulder. On the dresser she had laid out a digital camera, a pair of handcuffs, a package of condoms, some tranquilizers and a few assorted sex toys. There was also a 45 caliber pistol.

"Big date with a monkey?" I asked.

"Almost," he said. "A judge down here for a little liaison. I'm going to be bringing a very big case before him in a month. My client is guilty as hell. I bribed the escort he hired to let me meet him in his hotel room instead."

"You may look like a cute little cupcake now, but you are still on cruel Samoan inside those panties."

He smirked, grabbing a cigarette and clenching it between his pink lips. "Got a light, sailor?"

"I do, but I better warn you not to play that role too much around me. I am aching to jump you right now." I lit his cigarette, raising an eyebrow when I notice that it's a Virginia Slims. Keeping in character, I guess.

"As your lawyer, I advise you to remember that a high-heeled shoe to the groin can leave permanent scarring."

"Good point," I agreed, lighting my own smoke. "I understand the cuffs and the downers," I say as he puts the stuff into his purse, "but why the gun and the condoms?"

"In answer to both questions," he says, "a girl has to protect herself."

"You're not going to..."

He gives me a big, bright smile that is just about enough to make me lose my cool and says, "Oh yes I am. I am so horny right now I can taste it."

I was relieved when he left. It's one thing to watch a bunch of strangers become feminized, but it is quite another disturbing thing to see your drinking buddy like that- and to be blushing with desire when he stands close to you. I need to find some emotional equilibrium, and as usual, I turn to a little hard liquor.

Dar Williams is still singing, now "Traveling Again." A song about running away, that pure free high that comes from pulling up stakes and driving off to somewhere no one knows who you are or cares where you came from.

Driving I met a friend Who admits that the bottle Drove the women from his bed From his bed He says I'm not going to lose that way again But sober is just like driving More joy More dread Someone turns her head And disappears

More dread. More dread. What other strange selves will bubble up from somewhere deep inside this tired shell and confront me? What weird wants will flicker across my conscious mind, forcing me to warp and twist myself until I can cram them back into the serious darkness where they flap and twitter and scratch?

And where are these waves of paranoia coming from? Why do I feel that somewhere out there I'm stalking myself? That my shadow doesn't like me anymore and wants to trade me in on someone who spends more time in the sun?

The Baptists are changing, becoming something new and possibly better, but this is my trip, too, and every change in them seems to open a new fissure in myself, another fault line in the rock solid that I'd hoped was me. I slam more whiskey, lie on my back and think about the acid over on the nightstand. I think about Dr. Gonzo and those incredible smooth, round golden thighs emerging from the thin red fabric of his dress-a dress that looked so terrifyingly easy to tear. I think about taking the Ranma acid and I feel afraid.

"What am I reaching for," Dar Williams continues to sing, "that's better than a hand to hold?"

Sitting at the all-night
Picking up a pen
And I'm afraid,
was there any good reason
That I had to go
when all I know is I am all alone again

In a frenzy, I go into the bathroom and tear the plug out of the wall, silencing the infernal tape machine. I feel like I am a series of slides, moving not in liquid waves from room to room but as a particle of flickering light. I'm at the room bar, slamming more whiskey.

I'm watching television. Captain Kirk is strapped into a chair and someone is re-writing his memory. I'm on the balcony, drinking directly from the bottle now as the sunsets in the distance, casting the massive sky and all of Vegas in a now hauntingly familiar shade of hungry crimson, and I'm making small noises like a hungry lizard, waving my hands in the air.

It seems like no matter how much I drink I'm still hungry for more liquor. When will it all end? How will it all end?

Dr. J bursts into the apartment. She is wearing a black, blues brothers suit, and dark shades. She has dyed her hair and slicked it back. In the crook of her arm is a dusty, leather bound King James Bible that looks at least 200 years old. I realize that I am dressed in an identical outfit. It is morning. A cool breeze is fluttering through the open balcony doors, tossing it's way past the curtains and filling the room with the clean dampness of morning air.

"You ready?" She says.

"Hell, yes. Where are the boys?"

"They are all sleeping in the Reverend's room. We're going to wake them up now."

My head is splitting, but I leap to my feet and take the Bible from her. "I need a drink," I say, but she shakes her head.

"There will be plenty of time later."

When we walk into the room, the boys are scattered over beds, couches and chairs like forgotten laundry. Only, they aren't so much boys now. Not one of them is more than five feet tall, and they have the slender, rounded limbs of young girls and heads of thick shiny hair tumbling into their faces. They are all wearing cotton nighties.

"Is it done?" I ask.

Dr. J shakes her head. "Not exactly. They are still males in one biological sense. And they won't have totally changed over mentally, but they've gone a long way." Then, she went to the middle of the room and screamed "wake up!"

One by one, the little men began to stir, sitting up with bleary eyes, pushing back the thick bangs from their eyes, standing and stretching in their floor length cotton nighties. It was clear the drinking, drugs and lack of sleep from the night before had left them with serious memory lapses as they became aware of how they were dressed, how small they'd become.

Using tiny fists to rub tired eyes, they looked at themselves and at each other, their cupid's bows mouths dropping open in wonder and surprise. Soon the room was full of the chatter of small voices.

"What in the name of Jesus?"

"Is... Is it a miracle?"

"A curse?"

"Jesus never performed a miracle like this one..."

"What happened to us?"

They all turned to look at Billy Fountain. He was kneeling on his bed in his own nightie. Unlike the other men, who only had shoulder length hair, Fountain's glossy black hair went all the way down to his waist. Kneeling there on the bed, his hair all around him, his wide, dark eyes bright with confusion, he stared at the men he'd brought to Vegas and struggled for words.

"I... I think... I mean..." His lower lip started to tremble; he struggled to continue, "I'm sure this is just..." but the tears started to crest over his eyelids and pour down his smooth cheeks. "We have sinned," he said weakly, "this is all my fault."

The men, looking up expectantly at their pretty leader, all suddenly found tears in their own eyes as they unconsciously reflected Fountain's emotions, but before we had an all out tear fest on our hands Dr. J stepped forward. "Good morning, gentleman," she said in a deep, masculine voice. "May the love of Jesus be with you."

That stopped them short. All but Billy Fountain looked expectantly at what to them looked like a male preacher with his deacon at his side. Dr. J smiled, and they all seemed to relax. "It is a beautiful day, gentleman, no day at all for a group of pretty men such as yourselves to be cringing here in a musty old hotel room. Get yourselves dressed and go on down to the cafeteria for breakfast."

Smiles broke out on all the tiny faces, and they all moved to start getting ready, but suddenly Reverend Fountain leapt of his bed and strode purposefully over to Dr. J. Leaning forward, he put his fists on his hips and looking up at the much taller "man" and said, "And just who are you to be giving orders to my flock?"

"I am the Reverend Swift Justice," Dr. J answered proudly, towering over Billy Fountain.

Now, Billy Fountain brought up his left hand and started waving a finger at Dr. J. "Well, Reverend, these men all belong to my church, and we will not be taking any orders from a two-bit son of a devil like you."

"Tsk, tsk, tsk," Dr. J said. "Such talk from a little girl."

"I am not a girl," Billy Fountain said, his long black hair flying all around him as he violently shook his head from side to side. "I'm a man of the lord."

"You're a little girl. Look at what you're wearing."

"I'm a man," Reverend Fountain insisted impetuously, stomping his foot the first time he said and each time he repeated the word man. "I'm a man, man, man, man, man, man, man!"

Dr. J then put his hands under Reverend Fountains armpits, lifted him off his feet and carried him over to the mirror. Fountain was kicking and screeching. "Put me down! Put me down!"

When Dr. J did, Reverend Fountain found himself confronting the image of a button-nosed, feminine freckled face with wide, frightened eyes and a mop of long black hair pouring down over his white cotton nightie. He knew he had changed, but he hadn't seen himself

yet and the site of the tiny little muffin he'd become added to the humiliation of how he'd been so easily picked up and carried across the room was too much for him.

He turned to face the room full of the small, cherub-faced men his followers had become and gasped, "I am a girl!" before running back to the bed, throwing himself on the mattress and burying his head in the covers.

"It's okay," Dr. J said. "Billy will be all right. Get dressed now."

The room burst into a flurry of activity as the boys rushed about getting ready for the morning. They all, instinctively, needed to something with their hair, and they spent a good bit of time with brushes and bobby pins, scrunchies and turtle clips, ribbons and rubber bands fixing each other's hair into ponytails, pigtails and all manner of braids and weaves.

"Goodness," Dr. J said, "what is all this fussing about with hair?"

"We're boys," said a sandy-haired man with bright, mischievous eyes. "Our hair has to look pretty!"

"Maybe we should put some bobby pins in yours," a little man with strawberry curls said, swinging his brush playfully at Dr. J.

"Don't you dare," she said in mock horror, and the men all squealed with girlish pleasure.

"What about you?" One of them said to me, his face a devilish grin.

I'd burned my hair off long ago with over-indulgence in drugs and booze, and patting my bald head, I said, "If only you could give me some of your hair."

"No," he protested. "It's too short as it is!"

They all wore the same dress. It was a spaghetti strap sack dress made of white cotton that went down to their knees. On their soft, tiny feet they wore sandals. Billy Fountain had recovered somewhat. One of the other men had woven his black hair into long squaw braids that hung down on either side of his smooth cheeks. He was standing proudly among the other men now as they chattered amiably. "Feeling better?" Dr. J asked the little man.

Reverend Fountain blushed prettily, looking down at his feet. "Yes," he finally said. "I'm sorry I was rude to you Reverend Justice."

"It's okay," Dr. J said, patting Reverend Fountain on the head. "You're sweet."

Beaming with pleasure, Reverend Fountain grabbed the hem of his dress and did a little pirouette.

"Okay, Reverend Fountain, would you lead the men down to the cafe?"

"Yes," he said with a quick little bend of the knees. He strode to the door and pulled it open with both hands. The other men crowded around behind him as he peeked out into the hall. He was hesitating right in the doorway on his tiptoes, only his head outside the room. He turned back and faced the rest of the group.

"There are... regular men... out there!"

The Bible beaters all looked at each other with nervous faces. "You mean big boys?" One of them whispered.

"Big boys," Reverend Fountain nodded gravely.

"Don't be scared boys," Dr. J said. "Go ahead. No one will hurt you."

This seemed to make them feel safer, but just in case Dr. Fountain said "I want every man to take another by the hand. We stay in pairs. No one goes anywhere alone."

All the glossy heads nodded in agreement as they reached out and took each other's small, soft hands. A couple put arms around waists. Two by two, they crept out the door, as tentative as fawns.

I lit a cigarette. "They do seem to have been born again."

"Aren't they cute?" Dr. J asked, lighting up a slender brown cigar. "It's too bad you can't keep them that age forever."

"Too bad," I agreed. "But, hell. It looks like they are enjoying it while it lasts."

At breakfast, the men poured into booths along the windows. "Where are your parents?"

The waitress asked as she put water down in front of them and got ready to take their orders.

One of the men gave a mischievous look to the slender-armed man sitting next to him and said, "They're at a marriage retreat. They told us we could come down by ourselves as long as we stayed together."

"Well, you are the prettiest bunch of girls we've ever had in here, that's for sure."

"Thank you," they all chimed in sweet-voiced unison before giggling wildly. "I can't believe she thinks we're girls," one of them whispered to another. "Maybe it's because we have cooties," he responded nonsensically. That sent them into a laughing fit that only ended when they threw their arms around each other in a maidenly hug of joy.

When the food came Reverend stood at the center of the row of booths and looked at his shiny haired, apple-cheeked, bright smiling followers. "Let us pray," he said softly, and the little heads bowed. "Thank you, Lord, for these your gifts. Let us never complain over what you give us, and never long for what you bestow upon our neighbors. Amen."

"Amen," they said in unison.

When they were done, they all held hands and again made their way back up to Reverend Fountain's suite. When they walked in, their eyes danced gleefully. The room had been transformed. In one corner there now stood a playhouse full of dolls. In another, a large brightly lit table smothered in bottles and jars of make-up. A third corner held a VCR and a television, where videos of some group of lip-synching Christian boys was already playing. The last area was bursting with brightly colored pink and white toys.

"Can we play?" One of the men asked, looking at Reverend Fountain.

He looked around, biting his lower lip for a second. "These look like all the temptations that the devil offered Christ," he said weakly, hungrily eying the make-up table. "Worldly pleasures aimed to test a man's mettle."

"Please," the men began to yell in their tiny voices. They were grabbing the hems of their dresses as they struggled not to break out and run to start playing. "Please? Please?"

Reverend Fountain was standing on one foot now, his other foot on the first, he was turning it this way and that with uncertainty as he reached up and held his braids in his hands. "I just don't know..." he continued. "Somehow this all seems wrong to me..."

"Come on, Billy!" The man with the strawberry curls said. "I want to give you a make-over!"

"Okay," Billy finally said, his resolve reeking, "come on, men, let's play."

Billy and the little strawberry-haired man rushed to the make-up table and began eagerly pouring through the lipstick, looking for the prettiest colors. Other men joined them.

Some rushed to the playhouse, picking up baby dolls and arguing over who got to be mommies and who had to be daddies. The younger men went into the toy corner, grabbing Barbie's, my Little Ponies, Easy Bake Ovens and other toys, while still another group was gathered around the VCR, dancing crazily and singing along with the Christian Rock video in their clear, happy voices. Between songs they argued eagerly over who was the better singer or dancer, the more handsome of the boys.

"I like Isaiah," one said. "No, Paul."

"Paul! Yuck. Peter is really, I think, you know, more religious and everything."

"Peter? You are such a nerd!"

"Some men just can't handle booze," I said, looking over the bubbling scene. "It makes them mean."

Dr. J laughed. She was enjoying the scene. "Drugs," she said, "they are ruining the youth of America."

"Hell yes," I said, looking at the men dancing in the corner, their little legs stomping gaily as they jumped and capered, doing kooky dances, laughing and hugging. "This is shameful. Somewhere in the bible doesn't it forbid this kind of heathen fun? Dancing like that? With no rhythm? On the Sabbath?"

"I'm sure Reverend Fountain used to tell that to people," Dr J said, "but it's one thing for a anal-retentive, boozy middle-aged hypocrite to hate dancing. It's another for a little girl."

We glanced over at the reverend. He had blush smeared on his cheeks and a pearly pink lipstick on his mouth. He was giggling while he put some brown lipstick on the other man, who also looked like a clown with too much blush on his cheeks. "Do you have a drug that will help them put on their make-up?" I asked.

"Practice," Dr. J said. "It will come with practice."

Some of the men had found a big trunk full of grown-up clothes in the closet and started playing dress-up. It was probably a testament to the limited views they'd had of women that all of the costumes were secretaries, nurses, teachers and nannies. They shuffled around in over-sized heels and blouses, pretending to get coffee for the men who were their pretend bosses, or dutifully handing instruments to imaginary handsome doctors.

As they played, their bodies matured and developed. Small breasts pushed onto their chests, like the first shoots of spring flowers. This got them all excited and soon they were putting on training bras under their dresses. Later, as they developed further, getting the figures of teen-age girls, more and more of them were spending time at the make-up and video areas.

Finally around dinnertime, Reverend Fountain walked up to Dr. J. He was about five foot seven now, a cute teen-age girl still with the same long black braids. Practice had indeed improved his make-up skills. "Reverend Justice?" He asked.

"Yes?"

"What should we do now?"

"You're a reverend," J said. "You decide."

"You're teasing me," Billy Fountain said. "You know that in the Baptist Church, well, females can't be preachers."

"Females can't be preachers," Dr. J agreed. "In the Baptist Church. What is the proper role of women?"

"To be submissive to men," Billy answered without embarrassment.

"And do you still believe that?"

"Well, yeah, I guess."

"Okay, then. Keep it in mind. Still, though, I want you girls to get together and talk about what it means to be Christian young women. Talk about scripture. Make some choices. When you are done, I will tell you if I approve of your decision or not."

"Thank you, sir."

Billy called all the other men to stop what they were doing and come sit around him. They turned off the TV and sat on the floor in a semi-circle. "We should start," he began, "by

talking about the first man and the first woman. Eve," Billy cast a nervous, sidelong glance in our direction. "was a temptress."

Dr. Jackie signal to me that we should leave.

"Why?" I whispered. "This could get interesting."

"They'll feel inhibited as long as there are men in the room."

Dr. Jackie told me to get some rest. "I'll come and get you when things have progressed."

I stepped back into my own hotel room to find Dr. Gonzo at the bar, his back to me. He was still lethally female. He was wearing an extremely tight pair of cut offs and an electric green bikini top, his long hair piled high on his head. He glanced back over his soft, rounded shoulder and smiled. "Hi, Hunter."

Henry Miller once described an erection as "A piece of lead with wings on it." I knew what he meant right then, as I fought the weird waves of hunger that returned to me with such ferocity that I almost rushed over and crushed that little female in my arms, wanting to kiss her so hard that she went all weak in the knees. "How did your visit to the judge go?" I asked as I walked over to the bathroom sink and splashed some cold water on my face.

"Satisfying in every way," he answered with a giggle. "In every way."

"Well, congratulations."

"You want a drink?"

"Yeah."

Gonzo put the tape deck back on. It was Natalie Merchant.

Farewell today travel on now Be on your way Go safely away And never worry never care
Beyond this day Farewell tonight To all joy and to all delight

I walked awkwardly over to the bar, looking out the sliding doors at the empty sky. Trying not to look at Gonzo. It didn't matter. When I got over to the bar he was standing so close to me that I could feel the heat pouring off his compact little body. "Here," he held a glass out to me.

When I reached for it my eyes fell down onto the soft swellings of his breasts, the flesh around the bikini top was dimpled. I noticed a freckle on the side of one and glanced up to see that his eyebrows were raised in amusement. "See something you like?"

I nodded. I didn't see any reason to lie. "How much longer will you be like this? You're driving me crazy."

Gonzo walked to center of the room, raised his slender arms over his head and began swaying his hips to the music. "I love Natalie," he said. "She is fucking awesome."

Make way for the last King of May Open a hole in the sky for him And raise your voices up
Lift your loving cups To his long life His long life

"Gonzo," I said hoarsely. "You don't know what you're doing to me."

He smiled, burying his hands in his hair and pulling out a few pins, sending it tumbling down over his breasts. He tossed the pins away and buried his hands back in the ropey masses of curls, letting out a high pitched sound, like a baby bird. "I feel so good."

My hands were trembling when I reached for the bottle. I spilt almost as much as I got into my glass. When I closed my eyes and tried to calm myself, I saw that dangerous winsome shape, her face hidden in the mass of her glorious hair, swaying in that damn electric green bikini. I lifted the glass and belted down a mouthful, but when I felt Gonzo's soft breasts pressing into the back of my chest and his arms around my waist I knew that it was no good.

I spun around, grabbed him by the shoulders so hard that he gave out a tiny cry of pain. I didn't loosen my grip, but leaned down and kissed his upturned face. I felt him lift his leg and wrap it around mine, caressing the back of my calf with his toes even as his body gradually sagged more and more weakly in my arms. When I finally ended the kiss I had to support him as he dangled in my arms, sighing with relief, his head tossed back, eyes closed, mouth dangling open just enough to reveal right white teeth and the hint of a Easter pink tongue.

"As your attorney," he finally managed putting a hand to his chest. "I advise you to take a hit of Ranma acid."

"I don't think so," I said. Instead, I reached down, grabbed the middle of his bikini and snapped the strap, letting his breasts drop free.

He glanced up at me in some kind of small surprise and even alarm. "Hunter?"

That tiny look of fear and surprise drove me over the edge. I kissed him again, pushing him back across the room and down onto his back on the edge of the bed. He fought weakly, unconvincingly, and when I pinned his arms over his head and leaned in close, looking him right in his eyes, our noses almost touching, he whispered, "Oh, Hunter," in a voice so tiny it would have been cute for a mouse.

Strands of his long hair were scattered on the bed all around him. Some had spilled over his eyes and face. I kissed him right through it, forcing back into his mouth as we both reached down and started hunting for the button on his shorts.

From there it got strange. Weird memory flashes. After our first bout, Dr. Gonzo fed me three hits of Ranma acid and a heavy dose of Estrogenochrome. I never saw myself.

All I know is that I was all thighs and breasts, a jagged, broken bottle of female desire. Gonzo and I wrestled, tumbled, rolled, sheets and blankets tangled in our trembling limbs as he hunted out each other's hot, soft mouths, ran our hands through each other's hair, kissed and fondled our breasts.

I remember sleeping, our limbs all tangled, her spooning behind me warm and soft and protective, making me feel whole and complete and safe. I remember sitting on the bed while she brushed the tangles out of my hair, and me reading a poem to her by e.e. cummings. i like my body when it is with your Body. It is so quite a new thing. Muscles better and nerves more. i like your body. i like what it does, i like its hows. i like to feel the spine of your body and its bones, and the trembling -firm smooth ness and which i will again and again and again kiss, i like kissing this and that of you i like, slowly stroking, shocking fuzz Of your electric fur, and what-is-it comes Over parting flesh.... And eyes big love-crumbs And possibly i like the thrill Of under me you so quite new

We sat on the porch in each other's arms, cheek to cheek, while the breeze tossed our hair all around us, and watched the sunset in silence. We shared breakfast.

When I finally woke up Gonzo was gone. He'd written a message to me on the mirror in bright red lipstick. "Have to get out of this town. Leaving country."

I was in my male form again, fuzzy-headed and feeling weird. My heart ached with feelings of female abandonment. How could he just walk out on me after what we'd shared? And yet, my macho-mind was already repressing the memories, denying them, excusing them

as the results of bad acid and too much Estrogenochrome-anything but my own deepest needs.

It had been a weird mad trip, but then it always is when I come to Vegas, the very center of that malicious vortex we call the American Dream. Nowhere else in the world can you find a place so willing, so eager, so desperate even to whore itself to the planet and, in return, to make whores of us all. High quality potted plants, imported spandex, and g- strings covered with rhinestones-on the inside.

That, was Vegas; that, was America.

I dressed and went across the hall. I knocked repeatedly on her door, but there was no answer from Dr. Jackie. Finally, a housekeeper emerged from the room next door. "She checked out yesterday morning," the woman said.

"Christ," I wondered. "How long have I been out? And what the hell happened to the Baptists?"

I tried to call Jackie and Dr. Gonzo. Jackie's answering service said she was on a business trip. There was no answer at Gonzo's.

I gathered my own things. In traditional Duke fashion, I had no intention of paying the massive hotel bill Gonzo and I had run up. I packed all of the free soap and towels I could into my suitcase, stuffed a bottle of liquor in each of my pockets and headed out the door. Housekeeping's cart was still in the hallway, so I grabbed fistfuls of pillow mints and stuffed them into my bulging pockets. The cleaner saw me hovering around her cart and gave me a strange look. "I was just looking for a package of complimentary condoms," I said. "I have a... big date."

She smothered a grin. "You have to stay in one of the finer hotels if you want condoms," she quipped, "we don't even have a machine in the lobby."

"My mistake," I said, looking at critically at the roof and walls. "Well, you're doing one damn fine job if you ask me. This hotel is immaculate. Damn near spotless."

"Thanks," she said. "Coming from a man of refinement like yourself, that really makes my fucking day."

I knew then, for sure, it was time to leave. The housecleaners were getting hostile. Anger was all around me. I figured it was time to get in my car and boom for someplace a little more normal; I'd go see a friend in San Francisco.

I got past the desk clerk without incident and had my car brought around. The bellboy was struggling with bags. "What the hell do you have in these damn things?" He asked.

"A bunch of stuff I stole from the hotel room," I answered.

"Really?"

I laughed. He laughed, assuming that meant I'd been joking. "Buck up, man. You look Irish. Manual labor is in your blood."

He, with his milky-white complexion, curly red hair and florid complexion, didn't laugh at that last jab. When he finally got my bags into the trunk, I climbed behind the wheel.

He came to the door and cleared his throat. "How silly of me to forget," I said, pulling a handful of change from my pocket and throwing out the passenger side window where it clattered all over the boiling blacktop of the driveway.

I wasn't feeling good. I was almost sure that my publisher friend in San Francisco would pay me good money for the story of the Baptists with the gams, but unless I could find out how it ended I didn't have a story. It was a hell of dilemma. I badly needed money to finance my campaign for Sheriff of Aspen, Colorado. There was a freak power uprising going on out there, and I hoped to ride it right into the sheriff's office. My plan was to suspend the enforcement of all drug laws, thus saving the county thousands, no, make that millions, in jails, lawyers and judges.

I'm a damn fiscal conservative man. Save you money.

I stopped at a red light and wracked my brains for a way to find the Baptists. As always, there were people at the light approaching cars. I usually hated these people with a passion, but two gorgeous, lanky young women were approaching my car. They were wearing tight black pants, silky white blouses that were open practically to their navels, and fedoras. Leaning down at my window, one of them shoved a pamphlet into my hand.

"Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal savior?" She said in a molasses smooth voice that sent chills down my spine.

It couldn't be, I thought. But, who else? "I've been thinking about," I said nodding. "Oh yeah, man. But the Buddha offered me better stock options."

She laughed. "You're teasing me," the honey blonde said, licking her lips.

"Why don't you come to our revival tonight?" The dark haired girls said. She was leaning so low I could look right down her shirt.

"I'm experiencing a revival right now," I said.

Honey-hair put her hand on my arm. "Won't you come? Just for me? Pretty please?"

"How could I say no?" The light had turned green. "I'll be there," I called as I pulled away. The girls waved and smiled. I glanced at the pamphlet. It was for a revival at a place called The Chapel of the Forbidden Fruit, and it featured none other than a gorgeous woman with thick black hair called Byly Fountain.

"This," I decided, " I got to see."

As it turned out, the girls had gotten together and decided that they would make up for Eve's sin. While Eve had tempted Adam to evil, they would use their sexuality to tempt men back to the path of righteousness.

The girls had all grown up. Some were leggy colts, others small, girlish beauties. But they were all busty and sexy, and they gave one-hundred percent to use their assets in the name of Jesus. When I arrived at the Chapel, I was taken by the hand by a girl in a white corset with silver bows. I remembered her as a sandy-haired man, and a petulant teen-age girl, but now she was just a stunning, self-confident woman who threw off serious waves of sexual energy. She pulled me along, smiling back over he shoulder, and plopped me at a table near the stage.

Once I'd sat down, she put her hands on her knees and leaned forward. "I'll be your angel tonight," she said, playing with a button on my shirt. "Whatever you want, you just let me know. I'll take care of you."

With that hot-pink mouth and sultry voice, I had her pegged more as a devil, but then, the devil was an angel once, too. "I'd like a Bible, a crucifix and a shot of Jim Beam," I said.

"Okay," she said, tapping me on the nose with her index finger. "I'll be right back."

She brought all three. I felt strangely comforted.

The show was pure Vegas. The sound system began blasting a jive, bass-heavy version of Amazing Grace. Then, the girls came charging through the curtains. They were all wearing choir robes and had their hair tied back in serious buns as they shook and danced, singing out the words to Amazing Grace with a raw, sexual energy. Soon, they were shrugging the choir robes off their shoulders, stepping out of the fallen material to prance about the stage in their heels, bras and panties.

The crowd howled with holy passion.

It went on like that all night, the girls shaking and grinding to hip-hop and r&b versions of religious hymns, the crowd clapping and singing along. You were not allowed to shove money into the girls stockings, but were encouraged to shove little prayer cards where you'd written down the names of people you wanted them to pray for.

Twice the music stopped and Billy Fountain, wearing a bra and panties made of tiny pieces of glass that clung to his, I must admit, otherworldly tits, and made him shine and sparkle like a giant jiggling disco ball, came out and gave brief sermons. What I remember most clearly about them is that I the only time I could take my eyes off his breasts was to let them roam up and down his incredible thighs. Hours spent dancing in heels had given him- and the rest of the girls-- million dollar legs.

I almost found Jesus that night, but hell, I'm a jaded man. I must say, though, that more than one poor soul did find a refuge there in The Temple of the Forbidden Fruit. It's a twisted world, and a world that makes you wonder sometimes about the maker of this bitter planet. But after that night, watching those girls shake their asses for Jesus, I had to smile. It seemed somehow perfect. It seemed just. It didn't at all seem bad.

I turned on the CD player in my car. The voice of Dr. Gonzo came out of my speakers. His male voice. The one I knew. The one that didn't frighten me. "I made this CD for your trip back to California," he said. "Don't get any ideas, you sick bastard. It doesn't mean anything."

Then, I heard Ani DiFranco start to sing.

She says forget what you have to do

Pretend there's nothing outside this room

And like an idea she came to me

But she came to late

Or maybe too soon

I said please try not to love me

Close your eyes, I'm turning on the light

You know I have no vacancy

And it's awful cold outside tonight

I threw my head back and laughed, gunning my engine and aiming my car toward the dark, distant waters of the Pacific.

The End