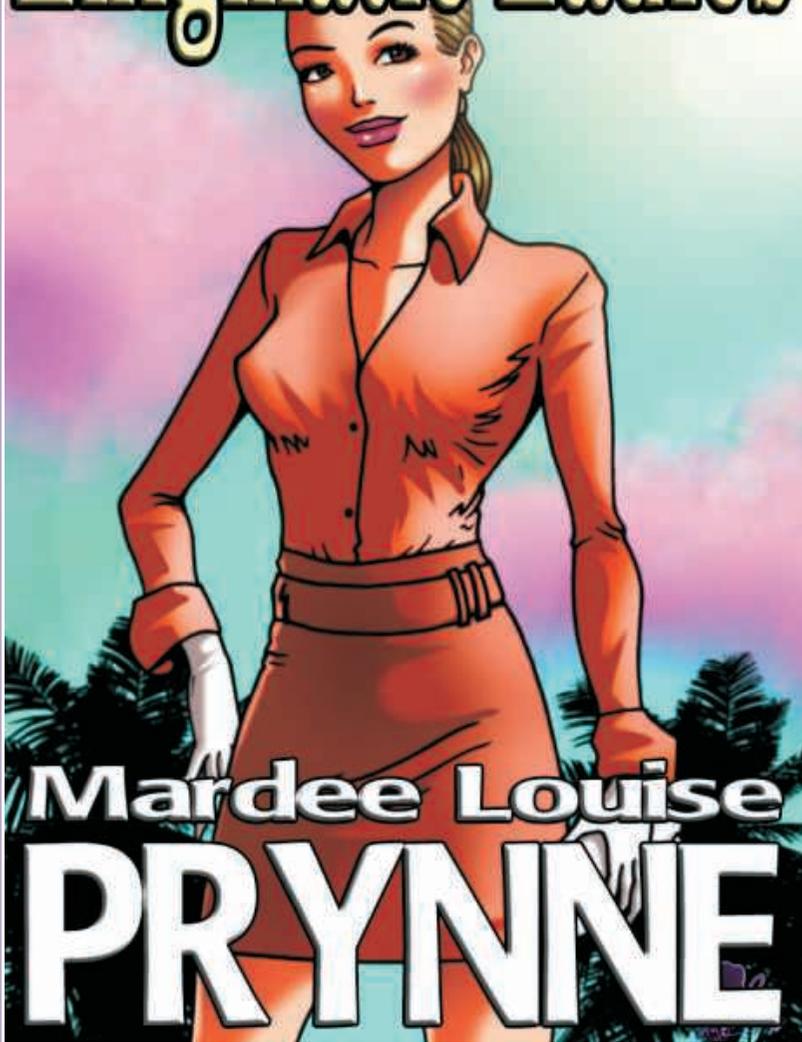


Enigmatic Ladies



Mardee Louise
PRYNNIE

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Enigmatic Ladies

By Mardee Louise Prynne

The phone jarred me, broke my concentration on what I was typing. I stared at the phone trying to will it to stop. It persisted until I picked. The telephone operator's voice announced "Person to person call for David Morris from Rena Gold." I knew it had to be she who was Rena Goldstein back in high school. I accepted with alacrity.

"Rena! You know I almost didn't pick up the phone." I hesitated, took another sip of bourbon and began to pull out of my funk. "Will you coming back to New York? If you are, we could get together. It's been how many years? But you couldn't have picked a better time to call me. I really should say a better time for me to hear from someone like you."

"I need a friend from high school, too. But to answer your question; No, I'm not in New York and

just too busy to get there. I just took a sublet on an apartment in Boston, Back Bay to be exact. That's where I landed after college and then life took me to England and the Continent. Now I'm back in Boston, which feels like home. There's a good chance of some big time, long-term activity. I promise to fill you in but you sound glum, very, very glum. How about opening up to your old buddy?"

"Give me a second to light up." I pulled a Lucky Strike from the pack, tamped it on the desk and reached for the lighter. Rena and I had always been a special pair right from grammar school through high school. She was thought of in school as a gifted dancer who had little interest in boys; no interest in dating them to be exact. Too focused on her art was the impression she gave. We enjoyed each other's company, liked the same music and art, and were both Brooklyn Dodgers fans. I was one of those guys who was a good athlete, an above average student, a competent musician as far as the high school orchestra went and, for reasons I still don't understand, always attracted to girls who ended up hurting me emotionally. Fair to say it was a two way street; as often as not, we hurt each other.

Rena and I went to movies, museums, baseball games and school events together; we even practiced French kissing together but it would be wrong to say we were dating in any real way. By doing things together we kept the girls at school from figuring out that Rena wanted to get into their panties. At the same time we made it look as though Rena and I were dating. Rena was satisfied with this strange status quo because it kept her parents off her back.

"Rob, are you still there?"

"Sorry, Rena, just day dreaming, thinking back."

“We’ll have plenty of time for reminiscing if you’re willing to go along with this idea I have. It’s much too long to discuss over the phone and I can’t possibly get down to New York for more than a day or two. Can you come up here for a couple of weeks? I know it’s a lot to ask.”

“Rena, you couldn’t have picked a better time to tempt me away from New York. Give me a few days to finish up a few projects and deliver an acquisition: then I’m yours for a week. Give me your number and I’ll phone you with my train schedule.”

“Can you possibly drive up? There are a few places I’d like you to see that aren’t in town and I don’t have a car. I can arrange for indoor parking for your car. If it’s a problem for you, I can rent one.”

“It’s not a problem at all.”

Rena promised to call once she had a phone installed in her new apartment and that was that. Cynic that I am, it didn’t long for me to wonder if I would ever hear from her again. Then I turned away from my desk to stare the granite box sitting on the bookshelf. The little brass plate on the top had only her name, date of birth, and date of death. Gianna Urbino was the most recent in that long line of women who were wrong for me. My sad, mad lover was Gianna on the dotted line but was always Gia over intimate dinners and more intimate settings.

She was a redhead, Italian descent from the hills on the Adriatic coast, the area whose women Titian used as models. Gianna was too otherworldly, too gentle to survive. Once upon a time she had slashed her wrists but in the wrong direction and so she lived on in pain just long enough to die by deliberately consuming a combination of psychotropic

medications and alcohol. Having loved her and having taken care of her, I accepted the request she made of me both in her will and in her suicide note that I take care of her ashes until I could find her brother. After that I was to scatter her ashes but she never said where. She trusted me to sense the right place at the right time.

Gianna's attorney assured me she had never met Gia's brother Lorenzo who had been kicked out of the house "likely for not being macho enough." Last known whereabouts was a restaurant and inn somewhere in northern Fairfield County, Connecticut. The attorney's attempt to contact the brother at that locale had come up blank except for "some idea the kid went up to Massachusetts maybe." A vague recollection of having seen a photograph of Gia and this brother sitting on a rock together reminded me that in their very early teens they could have passed for identical twins. So all I had to do was find a guy who looked almost exactly like Gia. Not an easy task even if he was still going by the name of Lorenzo Urbino. Like a lot of guys with the very ethnic name of Lorenzo, he was probably going by Larry. Impossible is a better way to describe my chances of finding him.

"It's rather a major challenge but if it can be done, you're the man to do it." At that moment, Gwen Loren seated herself on the corner of her desk and crossed her legs in a most unlawyerly manner. I flattered myself that she might have been flirting. Even through the still fresh wound of losing Gianna in so sudden a tragic manner, Gwen Loren's attractions were enough for me to notice through my haze.

"You're one of the best in your trade if not the very best. I've read articles about how you managed

to locate the rarest of lost books, letters, and manuscripts, not to mention all sorts autographed pictures and other literary memorabilia.

“Oh, yes. There is one more thing right now. I’ll arrange for the royalties on Gia’s books to be paid to you. That recent one was her breakthrough and will no doubt generate significant income, maybe even lead to a movie. As her attorney and literary agent, I have discretion over such things. Although I would be within my legal rights to use the income myself, I knew Gia well enough to know she would want you to have that income.”

I nodded and wondered how well she had known Gia and what had they shared between them. There had to be something closer between them than simply a lawyer/client relationship. Very few people ever called her Gia.

Unsettled as I was with that thought, I decided that was enough thinking about that conversation with Gwen Loren.

* * *

RECALLING PHILLY

I finished typing my notes and was about to leave the office when the phone rang. Another long distance call from Rena.

“David, it’s me. Sorry to bother you again. Remember my cousin Philly? Please do it for me: please stop off and pick him up when you drive up. You must remember him from high school. He was always kind of different and you stood up for him when he was teased and picked on. Philly’s found a niche and having a good life but really doesn’t like to travel alone.”

“For you, anything,” was my terse commitment. Rena always had a great telephone voice and it had improved over time, gotten sexier. Picturing her over the years made me resolve to make a move on her if she ever became less exclusively committed to female lovers. I guessed the wound suffered when Gia killed herself was healing.

“You’re a real pal. Say, Philly works in an inn and restaurant in Connecticut. Why not plan to stop over and take a day or two to get to know Philly again? Listen, I’ll get in touch with you again as soon my apartment is set up and the phone’s connected.”

Rena had to be hatching something but I wasn’t about to speculate on what. The clock the wall showed 9:30. The morning papers would be out about now so I figured on taking a walk; get some fresh air and a pack of cigarettes. (The early editions of morning newspapers in the New York City of that era hit the newsstands around nine the night before.) After telephoning my answering service to start picking up any calls, I closed the office and headed upstairs to my apartment to get a jacket and cap.

Better make a note to get in touch with Gwen and find out if she knows where the place Lorenzo had worked was in Connecticut and what it was called. It’s a long shot and too much of coincidence to hope for but I can’t help wondering if Philly could possibly be working at the same place where Lorenzo worked. Funny, I’m remembering more and more about Philly. Oh, to hell with the news papers. I want to look at some old pictures.

I found my high school yearbook in a cabinet in the spare room of my apartment. Of course Philly

wouldn't have an individual shot in there but he might be in one of the club pictures. Other guys and even some girls might have been in team pictures as well but not Philly. He just wasn't the type; didn't have the personality, the heart or the body for athletic competition. Sure enough, he was in several club pictures. Dance and drama had been his favorites. In Shakespeare's time when boys played all the female parts, he would have been a star. He was that nice looking. Unfortunately in the nineteen-fifties his looks worked against him. Just too pretty, too slender, too graceful in his movements to ever be taken seriously by anyone in anything.

Me, I thought he was an okay kid. I once told that to Rena when she was really angry at some girls who took teasing him a little too far. She confronted those girls eye ball to eye ball and even punched one as a "sample of what you creeps might get." The next day she was stopped in the hall by two of the boyfriends of girls in that nasty clique. She was in no mood to back off, never was. Rena punched the oaf square on the bridge of his nose and then stomped his foot with her saddle shoe. His buddy began to laugh which only called Rena's wrath down on him. He backed away from her half joking, half frightened until his back was against the wall at which point Rena kned him in the balls.

"Thanks for not stepping in to help me," she said to me smiling.

"I didn't think you needed any help."

"Right, but I need a favor from you."

"Cousin Philly's going to fail gym if he doesn't qualify on this ridiculous boys' fitness test. Please work with him. I'll understand if you're afraid to be

seen hanging around with him or going over to his house. Do it of me.”

“Sure I’ll do it but not just for you. I’ll do it for Philly, too.”

* * *

ONE THING LEADS TO ANOTHER

I called Philly that evening. I asked his mom if I could please speak with Phil only to be questioned on who wants to speak to him and why which was fully understandable considering how vulnerable this poor kid was to all sorts of bullying, verbal and otherwise. I explained who I was and that Rena had asked me to help Phil get through his gym requirements.

The next voice left me totally bewildered because I had always thought Phil was an only child but it seemed his sister had picked up the phone by mistake. There was a musical lilt to this mellow voice that enthralled me from the start. There was a bone I had to pick with Rena; why had she been hiding the owner of this charming voice from me?

“This isn’t Phil, is it?”

“In one sense it isn’t but I’m the person you asked for. It is me, David, but I hate to be called Phil. It sounds like I should be a taxi driver or something like that. Philly suits me so much better, don’t you think?”

I was so charmed by the voice that I would have agreed to almost anything. Philly’s image popped up in my head but just a little bit different from the way he really looked in school. In my mind’s eye his hair

was a tiny bit longer and combed in the sort waifish style made popular by several French movie actresses. His eyes looked larger. Makeup?

Philly was talking on the phone in this strange momentary vision. He sat on the edge of bed covered with a frilly edged comforter. His shapely legs were crossed and I could see he was wearing white short shorts.

What the hell! I must be going queer over this kid's voice. No, not me. It's just that the voice surprised me. Even so, it sounds really nice. No backing out now unless I really want to hurt this kid. Nah, might as well be nice to him and help him pass gym.

I told Philly we could meet at the athletic field early Sunday morning. "Almost no one shows up that early on Sunday on account of they don't want anyone to think they didn't have a late date on Saturday night. It'll give us plenty of room," I explained.

"That's fine. I thought you might not want your friends to see you with me, see you with the fairy."

"Philly, don't ever say that about yourself. And why would I care if anyone sees me helping out a good kid?"

I rode up to the field on my bike just as another bike was approaching from the opposite direction. After chaining my bike to the fence, I watched the other bike pull over. The rider stepped off the bike in a way that made to clear this was a girl's bike. Her back was to me as she tugged the hem her short shorts down in back. That wasn't enough to keep me from noticing her firm shapely legs, well toned the way Rena's were from dance classes. Then she

turned to greet me. Only it wasn't a she, it was Philly!

Philly took a white soft hat from the bike basket and put it on as she walked toward me looking too much like the fantasy image I had of him when we talked on the phone. White short shorts and a baby blue tee added to Philly's girlish image, an image that was just too natural, too unaffected to make Philly seem like an oddball. It was so convincingly femme that I swallowed hard hoping that this unique being wouldn't make me hard.

"David, you really kept your word. I can't begin to tell you how happy that makes me. Oh, I hope you don't think my hat looks silly. My skin's so fair that I burn easily."

"No, nothing about how you look right now could ever seem silly to me." My answer made her face light up and made me wonder where that answer really came from.

Philly put his hand lightly on my arm for a second or two before. "I'm yours for as long it takes. Say, so we loosen up or warm up before..."

"We can warm up by starting slowly."

Meanwhile Philly bent at the waist and put his palms flat on the ground. I was impressed by his flexibility as my eye drawn to the back of his thighs. The white shorts rode up just enough to uncover the hem of his white underpants. Pretty unremarkable for a boy except what showed was just a bit too shiny to be like what most guys wore.

We stood close as we started tossing a softball back and forth. Philly's catching was awkward but he quickly learned to hold the heels of his hands close together. Of course he stepped forward with

his inside foot as he threw which made look even more girlish. I had to stop myself from thinking he was cute in order to show him how to throw correctly.

After throwing against a target on a wall for a while, Philly's shoulder started to get sore. It was hard not to praise him for his rapid improvement as I massaged his cramped shoulder. "One thing for sure, you'll ace the softball throw both for distance and accuracy. We just got to work at it."

"Do you really mean that? Let's get out of the sun," she suggested without waiting for an answer.

We were in the shade on the side of the concrete grandstand when Philly sat down with her back to the wall and wrapped her arms around her knees. "Please be honest with me, David. You saw the hem of my panties, didn't you?"

"I saw the edge of your underpants, if that's what you mean."

"I mean panties, not underpants. You may want to hit me and I guess I deserve it for putting your reputation at risk I'm just so used to wearing panties around the house on quiet Sunday mornings that I put them on without thinking and then didn't realize it until I was almost here. Just promise me you won't tell..."

"Philly, I swear I would never tell anyone a thing that would hurt you or embarrass you."

I was beginning to realize just how odd, how different Philly was when he extended his hand toward me. I took it and helped the kid up a little too forcefully because he stumbled forward ending up right against me. The weird thing was that I didn't want us to move apart. Philly looked up at me, to my

wrists and planted my hands on her perky tush. (That was the moment when I admitted to myself that I was thinking of Philly as a girl.)

She looked up at me, rose on tiptoe and kissed me quickly on my lips. Looking shocked, Philly gasped. "Oh, my gosh! David, forgive me. That was just an impulse."

"There's nothing to forgive." My words were muffled by the open mouth kiss that followed. Her hand was behind my head pulling me harder and harder against her as if she couldn't get enough of my tongue into her mouth.

My hands were under her shorts now, feeling the sleek, smooth panties, tracing the seam at the rear of the crotch. Then I came.

"Maybe we better call it a day," Philly said dreamily. "Can you come over my house one night this week so you can show me how to do pushups? And if you never want to see me again, I'll understand."

"Pick the night," was all I said.

* * *

REVELATIONS

Philly greeted me at the door with an awkward and guilty grin as if she was about to announce a prank was imminent. The tilt of her head set off feelings in me that felt good but were not at all consistent with what a guy should be feeling for another boy no matter how femme a persona that other boy could assume.

“My mom’s at the movies so we’re alone. Does that upset you? Being alone with me, I mean.” There was a playfully challenging undertone to her question.

“Why should it?”

She pressed my hand in hers, glanced up and down the street before guiding me into the house and closing the door behind us. We’ll use my room.” I nodded and followed her up the stairs.

Philly wore tight white Bermuda shorts that skimmed over her dancer’s tush as she moved slowly up the stairs. Her tanned legs were toned well enough to make me wonder how much time she devoted to dance. The absence of socks had to be a deliberate attempt to show off her slender sculpted ankles, ankles that would be the envy of every real girl.

I held my breath as I followed Philly into her bedroom; unquestionably a girl’s bedroom right down to the French provincial furniture complete with upholstered chaise lounge and vanity table.

“Like it?” she asked.

“Pretty nifty.”

She had extended her leg, put her ankle over the back of a chair and was stretching like a dancer warming up at the barre. Hands grasping her ankle, she bent forward until her chin rested on her knee.

“Wow! You must take a lot of dance classes.”

“No, not any more,” she said wistfully. “Mother made me stop when I was seven.

She was afraid that continuing would make me more open to teasing and bullying. Rena kind of tutors me and helps me stay limber.”

Rena crossed her arms, grasped the sweat shirt she wore and pulled it over her head. She wore a powder blue tank top style undershirt, except for its color, very much like the kind men and boys often wore back then. Then I noticed the tiny appliqué flower at the center of the neckline. That and the total absence of hair on her body and arms further enthralled me. I was reacting her as I would to a real girl, more and more so by the second.

“Thank you for not being shocked at my underthings. I thought of not, not...Well, you know what I mean. It’s just that if we’re going to be around each other for a little while, I have to be honest about what I really am, whatever that is.” She sniffled as if trying not to cry. “Except for Mother and Rena, I’ve never dared to let anyone know how weird I can be when I’m by myself or....” Her voice trailed off into silence before finishing the last thought.

“Come on, Philly, don’t say things like that. You’re more than okay in my book.” I was surprised to hear myself say that and even more surprised that I meant it.

“Then we don’t have to have to be concerned that one of us might snitch or something.”

“I guess that’s right. Never thought about snitching ‘cause there’s no reason to, nothing to be gained and a whole lot to be lost.”

“You’re really such a special guy. Thanks for taking time to help me. You don’t mind of I get comfy.” It was both a question and order.

Even as she spoke, Philly was unzipping her Bermudas. She turned half away from me and lowered the shorts to reveal black stretchy panties!

“Dance trunks,” she said as if to let me know she was too much a lady to walk around in her panties in front of a guy who, despite his better judgment, was finding himself attracted to her like he never was to a real girl.

I followed Philly’s every move as she folded her shorts and laid them over the back of a chair. She paused momentarily in front of the vanity table to brush her hair. In a few deft strokes she transformed her hair style into the cute gamine cut that was becoming popular.

“Come in here, more room.” She led me into the adjoining room that held her desk, bookshelves and a couch.

“I’m really good at vee sits and I can do a whole bunch of sit-ups but not a single pushup, at least not the way boys are supposed to.”

She sat on the floor and by way of demonstration extended her arms and raised her legs together holding a perfect vee. Philly went through several different abdominal exercises that required both strength and control. She finally laid back, hand under her head, feet parted, knees bent. I stared at the crotch of her dance trunks the way I might have eyeballed a girl sitting that immodestly. My reward was a knowing look from Philly.

Her arms and shoulders were soft, firm but not well muscled. It didn’t take this lithe sprite to learn the correct form for regulation pushups. She promised to do at least five each morning and evening until I could come over again.

“Can I use the bathroom?” I asked awkwardly.

“Sure thing. Use mine.” Philly led me back into her bedroom, opened the bathroom door and

switched on the light. As the door was closing behind me, I heard Philly giggle and screech, "Oops, I should have closed the shower curtain. But, hey, you already know my secret."

In the bathtub was a drying rack festooned with a fascinating array of panties! I couldn't resist touching them, feeling the soft cotton, the sleek nylon and satin made all the more alluring by the knowledge they had caressed Philly's most intimate parts. All my inhibitions about queer sex were dissolving as my urge to make out with Philly increased.

I peed, then washed my hands and face with cool water hoping to relieve the flushed feeling caused by seeing Philly's panties in such wonderful array. I resolved to figure out a way to ask her to let me have a glimpse of her in panties without getting my face slapped.

My stepping back into the room made Philly screech again. She stood on front of her open closet pulling on a pair of panties. She froze just at the point where the waistband of the yellow cotton panties was bunched at the base of her tush. My cock started to stiffen as I eyed her perfectly smooth bottom and the back of her thighs.

"I must sound so corny yelling out like that. You already know what I am and no doubt you've seen enough dicks in locker rooms and besides all that, you're just not the kind of guy to get hot over a skinny boy's dick." She hooked her thumbs under the legbands and adjusted the panty to cover her perky bottom. This classic feminine gesture fixed my attention on the cleft between her muscular dancer's cheeks and the curved seam at the base of that fascinating nether cleavage. That the soft cot-

ton flowed gently over these forbidden curves added to the allure of this girl/boy.

Philly moved with excruciating slowness as she turned to face me. It was excruciating because it prolonged my view of her beguiling derriere while being removed from view. She stood facing me now clad only in her blue tank top, the yellow panties and her sneakers.

Her movements, her smooth hairless skin, everything about her had me thinking of her as completely female. Of course I knew she was a boy but with every second I was reacting to her more and more as female so that I was all but startled at seeing the outline of her cock through the flimsy cotton of the everyday panties.

It was something between a smile and sneer that flashed across her pretty face as she reached into her closet and took out a skirt flowing skirt. Already feeling like Alice must have felt in Wonderland, I was not too surprised. Turning her back to me, Philly donned the skirt by slipping it over her head and slowly lowering it into place, slowly enough for me to appreciate her panty covered bottom before it was covered by the skirt.

“Time for you to go. School tomorrow but do you think...Forget it. I’m being too forward, getting ideas about you that are unfair. Time to leave.”

I followed her down the stairs to the front door. Philly paused as she unbolted the door, opened it and stepped back into the shadows. It figures he wouldn’t want any of the neighbors to see him dressed like bit nobody could mistake this adorable cutie for the skinny, ineffective boy named Phil. Besides the door way was in darkly shadowed and no

one from school was likely to pass by on this short dead end block I guessed a boy who dresses up as a girl can't be too careful.

"David, come here." Her voice was firm and broached no refusal even while sounding soft and sexy. She pulled me away from the door. "Just in case Mother comes home early. Besides I'm more worried about your reputation than mine."

Philly held me by both hands and smiled; this time with no with no hint of a sneer. Her hands moved to my waist as she stood on tiptoe and closed her eyes. Our mouths met as her hand cupped my balls through my jeans.

Her arms were around my neck as I grasped her bottom and lifted her as we each tasted the other's mouth. "I want to taste every part of you..." she whispered and the suddenly shook herself from my arms and pulled away.

"I've done it, ruined any chance before it could even start. Oh, David, just go and if you want to hit me go ahead. I deserve what ever you do to me. But it's horrible. Just the thought of you hating me..."

"Philly come off it," I said as I grabbed her shoulders forcing her to stop flailing and look at me. "I could never hate you so stop being so emotional."

"You don't hate me for losing control, for showing you how weird I am inside? Honest?"

"Now when are we going to get together for the next session?"

A peck on the lips and I walked down the porch steps, turned and blew her a kiss. She couldn't have been more surprised by that gesture than I was.

* * *

AN INSPIRATION

I walked home as if my feet didn't touch the ground. At some level I knew I should feel guilty about what went on between me and Philly, which I should have felt threatened by not being repelled by this kid who described herself as weird. Using 'herself' was an indication of how much I was taken with this unique creature; strictly speaking I should have been as 'itself.' *Okay, so she's different, I reasoned silently. But no one's going to know and no one would ever believe it. Besides that, it can only go so far. It's not like we can go steady or be pinned. And she gets me really hot, hot like no real girl ever did.*

It was still pretty early when I got home to find a note from my father taped to the side door.

Rena called. Call her when you get home if it's not too late. Otherwise meet her in front of the school before homeroom.

Dad

After glancing at the kitchen clock I decided to give Rena a call. Her mom was the kind who was easily pissed off by any little thing she considered rude or vulgar but, what the hell!

Rotten luck was my first thought when her mother answered but, to my puzzled surprised she was quite cordial. Go figure!

Rena picked up the upstairs extension and waited for her mother to hang up before speaking. “Just one sec while I take the phone into my room.” Then a pause.

“You’ll never guess who called.” Without waiting for me to answer, she continued on. “Philly called as soon you left her. She couldn’t wait to tell me she let you in on her secret and that you were so sweet about it and didn’t get upset in the least. Now she has something to look forward to in her life. I have an idea but I won’t tell you just yet. I need to think it through. We need to talk, just not now, not on the phone.”

I got into bed and lay thinking about Philly. Why was she in such a hurry to tell Rena about our time together? Rena knew how to keep things to herself so there was no chance she’d blab all over school. But what was so private about this idea she had that she couldn’t say it over the phone? I stopped wondering about all these petty things and just kept picturing Philly as I dropped off into a deep and restful sleep.

I woke up feeling both excited and anxious about meeting Rena. A cold shower couldn’t get me to stop thinking about how swell Philly looked as a girl, swell even when her dick was visible in her panties. Even the cold water couldn’t prevent my dick swelling to full erection as I soaped myself. The only thing to do was to adjust the shower to warm and jerk off. I couldn’t have fantasized about even just making out with Philly, let alone actual sex in a bed since I hadn’t the least notion of what we would do

together. The recollection of kissing her and petting her tush was enough for me to get myself off in record time.

Rena was waiting for me on the steps in front of the main entrance. She waved to me as she reached into her pocket book to pull out a pack of cigarettes. “Sit down and give me a light and don’t remind there’s no smoking on school property.”

“Okay, but don’t hand me the cigarette if...”

“I won’t and you know it.”

Rena looked around and then leaned closer to me.

“Here’s why I called last night. When Philly called to tell me how great you made her feel, she went into a lot of detail about how she looked and that got me more than a little hot. I’ll hate you forever if you tell anyone about what I’m going to say to you and I swear I’ll get back at you sooner or later if you do tell.”

“Rena, you have enough to tell on me that’ll ruin me in this school forever so we’re even. No telling.”

“You probably figured out that I get off by finger fucking myself while looking at sexy ads in teen fashion magazines. Now I want to know what it feels like to have a cock inside me but I can never give myself over to a boy.”

“But how do Philly and I figure in the solution to this problem you have?”

“If I made out with a boy or a girl like Philly, however you want to think of her...Get it? Someone who has a real working dick but can look sexy as hell in a bra and panties, I’m sure I’d get off on her dick.

“It’ll work like this; you start making out with Philly when she’s in girl clothes and undies and then I join you two then get into making out it with you and her. I read about that kind of sex; it’s called ménage a trois in French. Don’t answer me now but think about it. Maybe start a little petting with Philly. I know it’ll be hard, I mean difficult for you...”

“Not as difficult as you think.”

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REVIEWING MY NOTES

A glance at the clock reminded me that I had spent a lot of time reminiscing about Philly, Rena and what transpired way back then. I had been taking notes on my recollections and reviewed them as my mind bounced from one incident, one visual recollection to another. It was necessary to force myself to stop or I would never have gotten enough rest to cope with my morning appointments. There were memories that needing sorting out before I wrote them down for a retrospective journal I knew I must write, write to clear my conscience and to reassure myself that this was a one time thing, that I was never really queer.

My business was growing along with my professional reputation. Along with success and increased income came increased pressures and demands on my time. I had already contemplated hiring a full time secretary but believed it would be, at best, more of a convenience than a necessity. It could also turn out to be a major inconvenience.

But now that I would be spending time in the Boston area with Rena, I would need someone or something more directly attached to the business than an answering service and a stenography and typing agency. That was something I had to plan in detail before I spent more time on this half formed idea a journal chronicling what happened between Philly and me so long ago.

I wondered why I was so stuck on mentally reliving what should be something I ought to try to forget, to bury from anyone's view. There was no reason to believe that Philly hadn't either straightened out or beaten to death by someone who had mistaken her for a real girl until he found out otherwise, or any of a hundred other possibilities mostly negative if not tragic. *What a waste of uniquely beautiful being. No, can't say that for sure. I hate to admit it but it was more of a wasted opportunity for me, an opportunity for something special that I had let slip by.*

A shower and then to bed.

While dawdling over breakfast, I drafted a few want ads for the secretary/bookkeeper I decided I needed. Then I phoned the Brooklyn Eagle and placed the ad to run for a week.

Then it was down to the office to get ready for handing over a validated original print of the photograph of Charles Dickens taken by Jeremiah Gurney in 1867. Its provenance was impeccable which added to the value. It was going to be a great payday. Neither the seller nor the buyer was going to be present, only the attorney and agent for the anonymous buyer.

The photo was handed over to the agent and I took the cashier's check in return.

The attorney put all the papers belonging to her client in her brief case and glanced over her shoulder as if to make doubly sure her client's agent had left. Gwen Loren's poker face slowly warmed, warmed so far that it seemed enticing.

"I hadn't planned to be at this transaction." She sounded more than little awkward for a female lawyer back when law schools discouraged women from applying and no firm worth its salt hired them. That may have been why Gwen had developed her own private practice. Her uneasiness in talking might have been faked for unknown reasons. It had to be something personal that made a female lawyer seem hesitant back when only the sharpest and most determined women even got into law school.

"Truthfully, I was surprised to see anyone else at this transaction let alone a lawyer and certainly not you."

"I hope I didn't offend you. You see I wanted an excuse to see you so we could talk privately, off the record..." She didn't end her sentence as much as let it fade. It meant there was more to come. Whatever it was not something that Gwen was comfortable talking about.

"You didn't offend me but at risk of offending you, I would never take offense at being with a woman as attractive as you at any time in any context. Now, out with it. What's on your mind?"

Maybe I had gone too far in pressing Gwen Loren to open up. The ex-cop attitude might not do for a classy lady like Gwen who surely had to put up with a lot as a law student and survived. I had to remind

myself that she was probably as tough as she was classy.

Gwen dropped onto the couch like a little girl who was about to be chastised. Her sitting posture became closed, her hand moved to her face and rested there as if she was going to suck her thumb. To prevent her from doing that and embarrassing herself, I offered her a cigarette. That brought her out of her momentary mood.

“Thanks but I have my own.” She pulled a box of Benson & Hedges from her pocketbook, put one in her mouth, and then took it out as she groped for her lighter. I lit the table lighter I kept on my desk and held it out to her. Her hand shook as she steadied the lighter.

“David, may I call you David?” I nodded and she continued. “This is so hard for me to say so please just listen and not judge.

“When I was a child things went on that resulted in me being fascinated by transvestism, crossdressing. I’ve never lost that fascination or my interest in the realities of transvestism. This business with finding Lorenzo brought it all to the surface. You may have seen a lot of kinky stuff when you were a police officer so I’m hoping you’re not shocked.

“You see, I knew Lorenzo and Gia years ago. He enjoyed pretending to be a girl and fooling young men. There’s more to it than that but I’m not yet comfortable talking about it. Just give me time.”

“Would you like to be reunited with Lorenzo when I find her?”

Gwen was laughing now. “That’s so ironic; you called Lorenzo her.”

“Gwen, there’s something I must ask you to read.”

She nodded. I took the notes on my recollections of Philly and Rena and handed them to her. “There’ll be more.”

Gwen read the notes, looked up at me with an expression that was both curious and perplexed. She immediately reread the notes.

“David, I was attracted to you when we first met, more so than I would ordinarily admit. That you would share these notes with me tells me you’re confident in who you are. The way you treated Philly means you’re sensitive and caring. Perhaps my woman’s intuition gave me insight into just how kind you are.

“I would love to spend time with you, get to know you. Be nice if something came of it.

“Sweet Jesus, I’ve said too much. Pretend you didn’t hear my silly schoolgirl ramblings just now. That isn’t why I came here.”

“It’ll be hard for me forget what you just said, hard even to pretend for even one minute that you didn’t say it. But I can force myself if that’s what you want. Okay, now it’s back to business.”

“Thank you, David. There is need in my practice for someone with your skill in locating rare books, antiques, and so on. I won’t go into details unless you’re interested but it would be of great value to me if you had a New York State private investigator’s license.”

“Gwen, I would be delighted to work with you. Tell me more.”

There was a long as she organized her thoughts. My guess was that she was at least a competent lawyer which led me to think she was planning the best way to tell me why she wanted me to work with her while maintaining confidentiality. Her gaze shifted from direct eye-contact to studying the smoke of her cigarette as it drifted toward the ceiling to admiring her shoes. All of which was fine with me as her smoking technique was intriguingly sensual.

What she said was even more intriguing. She had a number of clients whose wills and estates she had set up. The clients in question all had valuable objects that had gone missing. For the most part these objects were the sort I dealt in.

Anticipating the obvious question, Gwen explained why these clients would not go to the police. Each client had a child in their very late teens or twenties who had precipitously left home or had broken off all contact if they were already living away from home. Each family noticed their treasures had disappeared at around the time their offspring had taken off for parts unknown. There was no reason to believe foul play was involved in the departure of the young people. It was likely that the runaways as the families called them, had taken the missing objects although in a few instances the families were positive at least some of the objects had gone missing weeks or months after the offspring went missing.

“There’s another reason why these families don’t want police involvement. Every missing kid has what the shrinks call an ‘inversion.’” (Inversion = an archaic term for sexual difference e.g. transvestism, homosexuality, and other variations that are just that; *variations*.)