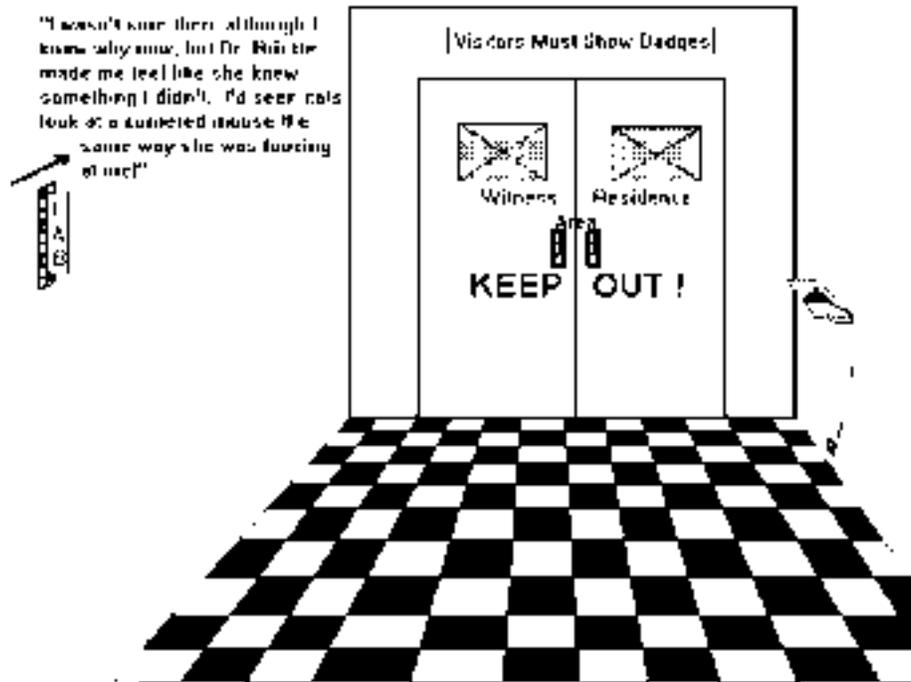


# SURPRISE

*By Raven Starke & Dr. Linden*



ILLUSTRATED BY RAVEN

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A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL

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## I WITNESS

**By Raven Starke**

I'm hurrying as quickly as I can over to the loud table of eight, dodging the groping sea of hands as I navigate my tray of martini's. I detest the way the customers whistle at me as I walk past. And the lewd remarks some make would cause a stevedore to blush!

I deliver each of the drinks without spilling a drop, demurely accept the \$1.00 tip and pinch on the ass, and then head back to the bar for another round.

I haven't worked here at Club Galaxy for long, but then, I never work anywhere for very long. Not since I turned state's evidence against the head of the New York crime family. The government had made my choices simple; either become a stool pigeon, or do 15 to life in Leavenworth.

I should've chosen Leavenworth!

My name is, or I should say was, Glen Bronson, and I worked for the Easy Rider Messenger Service in Manhattan, delivering business documents of all kinds on my bicycle.

One day, I was pedaling south on Second Avenue to deliver an envelope in The Village when I heard what sounded like a muffled gunshot from the limo alongside me. Just as I turned my head towards the rear of the vehicle, I saw the power window roll down, and a distinguished looking man with perfectly coifed gray hair throw a gun into the curbside gutter.

The car made a quick right on E. 14th street and sped off. I knew immediately that I'd just witnessed a mob hit, committed personally by the reputed head of the New York crime family, (Dapper) Joe Lozari.

Now, being a native New Yorker, I knew better than to see things I wasn't supposed to see, so I just filed what happened away as another interesting day in the Big Apple. I had no intention of being a 'good samaritan'.

It was my bad luck that a couple of tourists from Wisconsin also heard the shot and remembered seeing the name of my messenger service on my bicycle. In no time, the cops tracked down my boss, and he led them to me.

At first I denied having heard or seen anything, but then this cop, Lt. Reilly, showed me a picture the pain in the ass tourists took of me looking straight at the car after the shot occurred!

Lt. Reilly and the other cops in the Organized Crime Division let me know in no uncertain terms that if I didn't tell a grand jury what I knew, they'd see to it that I was charged with obstructing justice. They also brought up the fact that I was technically

still on probation for accidentally running someone over last year while under the influence of alcohol. They had my nuts in a vise!

I sweated it out down at the police station for several hours before finally giving in. What choice did I have? At 22, I was much too young to spend the next 10-20 years of my life in prison. Besides, I had no desire to become the love slave of some prison gang leader!

Although I was in excellent condition, I've never been what you would call the 'jock' type. At 5'10", I was more the wiry kind. I had good looks, even if I did appear to be a good 5 years younger than my age, and I never had any trouble getting a date, due to my reputation as a great dancer...for a guy!

For the next 8 weeks I was kept under lock and key in a government safe house in Connecticut, surrounded continually by armed guards. Twice a week my parents and younger sister would be driven blindfolded out to see me, and once a week my girlfriend Delia would do the same.

We'd been seeing each other for almost a year now, and I was beginning to think that Delia might be my 'Miss Right'. Taller than me by two inches, she was a knockout, even though she rarely flaunted it. Her short, sassy brunette hair set the tone for a no nonsense approach to life. Although she possessed the body of a Playboy centerfold, Delia usually covered it up with the sensible, well tailored business suits she wore as a banking executive with Chase Manhattan.

Finally, the trial came, and I nervously and reluctantly went into court, looked Joe Lozari right in the eye, and swore under oath that he was the one I saw toss a pistol out of the car they found Tommy 'Noodles' Carponi's body in.

He got life without parole, and I disappeared!

"Hey, what happens now?" I asked Lt. Reilly as I was led out a back entrance to the courthouse.

"Witness Protection Program." he shot back through the clenched jaw I'd seen so much of these many weeks.

"Yeah, I know. But where? How?" I responded, a little annoyed at my inability to get any specific details about the 'new life' the government promised me.

Before an answer could be given, we were in the back seat of a bulletproof sedan and heading out of the underground garage.

"It's better that you don't know until we're at the Witness Reassignment Center. That way, you won't accidentally reveal something to your family or girlfriend. Loose lips could get not only you killed, but them too!"

I hadn't thought of it that way.

We drove for quite a while before reaching our destination, wherever that was. I was led out of the car and, judging by the echo, into a large metal building of some kind. Lt. Reilly kept a firm grip on my right biceps as I was led up a short flight of stairs and into a room where I was seated.

"Now that we're here, can I remove the blindfold?" I asked impatiently.

“Not just yet, son. But this is where we say good-bye. Thanks for all your help, and good luck!” came the reply from the lieutenant. Before I could even respond he was gone and I heard the sound of an engine coming to life.

“I’m in a helicopter!” I realized as the familiar rotor sound picked up in intensity.

I felt the presence of two new 'keepers' on either side of me as the chopper lifted off.

“I’m Vincent Taylor, and this is my partner, agent Linda Pike, we’re with the Justice Department, and we’ll protect you until you’re ready to assume your new identity.”

At the time, I remember thinking that I wished I could have seen agent Pike. If she looked anything like her perfume smelled, she must have been a knockout. I later found out how right I was!

The flight lasted about 20 minutes before I felt us descending. I was helped from the plane by agent Pike, and was struck by the strength in her hands as she partially lifted me out of my seat.

Wherever we were, it was very windy, and I was grateful once we got indoors.

“Alright, get his mask off.” ordered agent Taylor.

Once my eyes adjusted to the harsh fluorescent lighting, I immediately looked for a hint as to our location, but found only painted walls staring back at me.

“Mr. Bronson, as per your agreement with local and federal prosecutors, you are now a member of the Advanced Witness Protection Program. From this day on, until the directors of this program deem you ready to assume your new, protected identity, you will do exactly as they tell you. Failure to do so, will result in immediate punishment. Do you understand? If so, sign here, here and here.”

Now, as I relate my story, I wish I’d read those thick documents much closer, but at the time, I just signed them, anxious to get on with my new life. I had it all figured out.

I assumed they’d just give me some new identification and a job in some far away, Godforsaken place like Boise, Idaho. If I was lucky, they might even give me some cash to live on and a house. Once I got there, I planned to call Delia and get her on the next flight out to join me. Little did I know!

“Here are the rules, Mr. Bronson. 1) You are never to leave your quarters unless escorted by one of us, or another employee of the program. 2) No phone calls. Do you understand these simple rules?” Agent Pike asked me, her well coifed hair bouncing coyly in the process.

“Uh, yeah. But for how long?” I asked again.

“As long as it takes, my dear Mr. Bronson,” answered a voice from behind me.

I turned immediately and came face to face with a heart-stoppingly gorgeous woman dressed in a knee length black skirt with matching stockings, and a pure white lab coat that hugged her every nook and cranny. She towered over me due in part to the extremely high heeled black pumps she wore.

“I am Dr. Sheila Brickle. I’m the administrator here. It’s my job to ensure the success of your new identity.” She said smilingly.

“A doctor? What is this, some kind of hospital?” I asked reflexivity.

“Not really, although we do have specially trained physicians on our staff. My title comes from having a Ph.D... in psychology and human behavior.”

I wasn't sure then, although I know why now, but Dr. Brickle made me feel like she knew something I didn't. I'd seen cats look at cornered mice the same way she looked at me.

I was taken down a long windowless hallway and through a set of double doors on which was written:

**WITNESS RESIDENCE AREA  
KEEP OUT!**

Judging by the number of different rooms with names on them, there appeared to be others in the program with me. How they could maintain the confidentiality of everyone's new identity that way was beyond me, but I at least was glad that I wasn't here alone with these government robots!

We stopped outside a room, on the door of which was a card which read:

WPP Subject #233

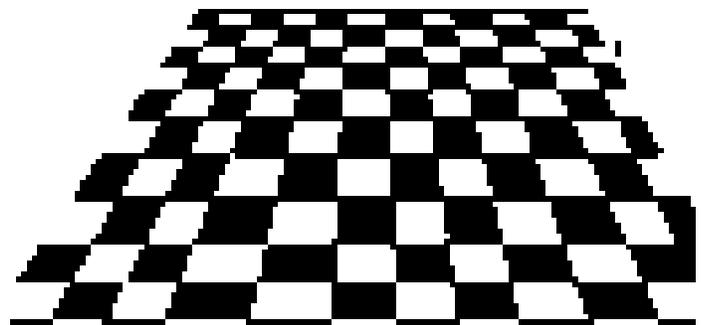
“This is your room, Mr. Bronson. From now until further notice, you will be referred to as 233! This is for security reasons. Eventually, you will be assigned a new name that suits your new identity,” Dr. Brickle said, matter-of-factly.

I looked inside, hoping to see accommodations at least befitting a Motel 6. Instead, I saw a room totally devoid of any personality or decoration. From the gray tile floor to the white walls and acoustically tiled ceiling it appeared to be nothing but a storage closet with a bed, a single chair, a bathroom and, thankfully, a television.

“What the fuck is this?” I asked. “I risk my life giving you guys the evidence to lock up Dapper Joe Lozari, and I end up staying in a worse cell than the one he's probably in tonight?”

I was furious at being treated like a piece of driftwood, and I let them know it, too.

“233, you've got to understand. We have certain methods we use in helping you to fully adapt to your new identity, and the accommodations are



part of that plan. Believe me, in short order you will earn the right to move into more elegant quarters.”

Dr. Brickle had responded quickly and deftly to my outburst, causing me to rethink my behavior and give them the benefit of the doubt. Especially after she pointed out that they were only here to make sure I wasn't killed in retaliation for my testimony.

That night I fell into bed, exhausted from the stress of the courtroom and the trip to the 'Facility', as they called it. I tried to find something on tv to watch, but found that most of the channels were dark, the lone exception being what looked like an 'infomercial' for women's products.

“I've got to at least get them to hook up cable while I'm here.” I remember thinking as I climbed into the high, hard bed dressed in my usual nightly attire: Jockey shorts and t-shirt. I lay there for a few minutes wishing Delia were beside me so I could feel her hands on my cock. Thinking of her gave me a hard-on, and I fell sound asleep after a session of 'choke the chicken'!

Morning came quickly, and early, when a big black guy dressed in a black jump suit flipped on the overhead light in my room.

“What the...? What time is it?” I asked as my eyes adjusted to the harsh light.

“Almost 6:00am, 233. Hurry up and get dressed for breakfast.” he boomed as he placed a garment of some sort on the foot of the bed.

I felt silly following the big guy down the long corridor to the cafeteria dressed in a light green paper smock. I looked for signs of the other witnesses in the program, but to no avail.

The smell of food reached me before I actually saw the cafeteria, and I was reminded of the fact that I hadn't eaten a thing since lunch yesterday at the courthouse.

“Good morning, 233! Please take your seat with the others.”

Dr. Brickle looked bright eyed and energetic as she indicated a far corner of the large, sterile looking room. For the first time, I noticed other people that looked to be members of the program like myself. In general, they were a sordid looking bunch of mobster types and criminal lowlifes. In the center of the dining room sat a group of about 8 of them, some I recognized.

I knew that the short, fat guy with the full head of curly black hair and the number 215 sewn onto his coveralls was Saul Bornstein, the bookkeeper for Meyer Goorwitz. He'd turned stoolie and testified that his boss had murdered several Marine guards, stolen a truckload of Stinger missiles, and sold them to Israel for \$35 million.

And I also recognized #321 as Natalie (The Enforcer) Crab. Her picture had been all over the gossip rags for weeks. It seems that she at one time worked as an informant for the FBI by infiltrating radical feminists groups like W.A.M.M. (Women Against Marrying Men), and L.L.A.M.A. (Lusty Lezzies Against Men Altogether). While the government thought she was on their side, Natalie was actually working as a double agent, and revealing all their plans to the leadership of those groups. Her downfall came when they robbed a San Francisco area bank and a surveillance camera caught her holding down the bank president while the leader of the group, and her lover, JoJo

Sims put a bullet between his eyes! In order to avoid the gas chamber Natalie agreed to squeal on everyone she'd ever met in the feminist underworld, in exchange for a new identity and no jail time.

I followed Dr. Brickle to the corner table where two men and one woman sat quietly eating the small portions of food on their trays.

Unlike the other group of scumbags, these individuals looked decidedly unthreatening and...normal.

"This is our newest 're-assignee'. I'm sure some of you may know him from the newspapers, but you may call him 233." the doctor said, by way of introduction "Please introduce yourselves to him, and explain why you're here."

Hesitantly, the middle-aged man with the thick glasses began to speak.

"I'm number 288. I was put into the program after I blew the whistle on cost overruns against the government by General Kinetics Corp. They were fined \$350 million and denied another \$2.5 billion in government contracts as a result."

"I'm number 299," the man next to him offered confidently. "I'm here because I overheard the owners of two NFL teams discuss fixing the Super Bowl. They planned on earning more than \$200 million each when the underdog won. Instead, they're each doing 7-10 for sports gambling, and they had to sell their franchises and pay \$100 million in fines!"

299 took a long drag on his cigar as he leaned back in his chair.

"I'm, uh..., Maria Conchita Angelena Gonzalez. I've been here for 3 months. I was, uh, part of a drug cartel that sold dope to children, and then sold them into prostitution. I led a government hit team to the manufacturing plant in Colombia, where they shot the ringleader, Francisco Munz. Ever since then, his brother Carlos has vowed to kill me."

The woman's lower lip quivered as she spoke, as if she were fighting back tears. Although not unattractive, she had a somewhat masculine appearance, except for the swell of her full breasts, and she seemed very uncomfortable in the plain blue shirt dress she wore. I sensed that there was more she wanted to tell me, but Dr. Brickle cut in before she could go on.

"That's enough for now. I'm sure the others will get around to telling you their stories soon."

The doctor saw the questioning look I had, and correctly interpreted it's meaning.

"You must be wondering why Maria gave you her name, instead of a number? Well, that's because she's been assigned her new identity already, and getting used to the name is part of the training," she explained as she massaged the cowering woman's shoulders.

"But what about security? What if one of us decides to sell her out after we're released?" I asked.

“In that case, 233, everyone with the knowledge of her new identity will be dealt with most harshly. And unlike the mob, there's no place to hide from us!” she countered in a no-nonsense tone of voice that got everyone's attention.

I ate my small portion of food greedily, every now and then sneaking a surreptitious glance at my fellow travelers. One by one they finished their meal and were led away, and so was I.

My day was filled with taking tests on a variety of subjects such as general knowledge, ability to remember new information, adaptability, etc. By nightfall I was too exhausted mentally and physically to do anything but fall fast asleep.

This testing phase went on for 3 days, and every day began with my demanding to know when I'd be set free to start my new life.

Late on the evening of the third day I was called into Dr. Brickle's office.

“I've finished compiling all the data on you, and we're ready to begin preparing you for your new identity.” She said as she shuffled a stack of papers before her.

“Great! I was beginning to feel like a rat in a maze here. So, what's gonna happen? You give me some cash and fake I.D., then set me up in business somewhere like South Dakota?”

I tried to hide my sarcasm, but I think I failed.

“Not exactly, 233. It's my responsibility to make sure that you're safe from mob retaliation, and to see to it that you're capable of supporting yourself. We don't give you any money. Within those guidelines, I have complete autonomy to do whatever I think best to meet those responsibilities.”

I thought I saw a sardonic smile on her usually stony face.

“Hey, I can support myself. I'm a hell of a bicycle messenger!” I bragged.

“Indeed you are, 233. Unfortunately, that's the first place Lozari's goons would look for you. There also aren't any bicycle messengers in Los Angeles.”

“L.A.? Hey, that's cool. Sun, sand, beautiful beach babes. So maybe I'll become a movie star?” I shot back, excited by the idea of moving to the west coast. I was relieved that she didn't say South Dakota!

“Starting tomorrow you will begin training in earnest for your new identity, and I promise you that it will be difficult and most educational.”

I had a million questions, but she just led me from the office and back to my room without responding.

Once there, she pushed the call button outside the door, and two of the pumped-up assistants arrived almost immediately.

“Hey, what's goin' on, doc? Why the muscle?” I asked.

“Just in case, 233. I need to give you an injection to help you sleep,” She said as she inserted a hypodermic needle into a small vial.

“I've been sleeping like a baby, doc. I don't need that!” I hate needles!

“Just a precaution, 233. I'll explain it all to you in just a few seconds,” She said soothingly as the two hulks each grabbed an arm and held me still while she slipped the hypo into a vein.

The injection must have contained Extra-Strength Sominex, because almost before she even withdrew the hypo from my arm I began to feel drowsy and very, very relaxed.

“There now, 233...that wasn't so bad, was it?” Dr. Brickle asked, her voice sounding like we had a bad long distance connection.

“I didn't need a shot,” I slurred.

“I'm sure you'll be grateful for the sedative in just a few moments.”

She removed a file folder from the briefcase one of the assistants held, and placed the contents on the night stand beside my bed.

“Does the name Michelle Zelinski mean anything to you?” A voice that sounded like Dr. Brickle's asked from far away.

“Uh,...no,...maybe...uh,...why?” I answered and asked from inside the fluffy clouds.

“A little over a year ago, she was minding her own business, walking to meet her fiancée at the Second Avenue Deli in the East Village, when a drunk driver jumped the curb and dragged her 50 feet along the pavement before pinning her broken body against a brick wall! Do you recall the name now?”

Dr. Brickle's tone had risen steadily as she spoke, until it no longer seemed so far away.

“Uh,...yeah. But I swear it wasn't my fault. I'd only had a few beers.” I said guiltily. Even as I drifted under the influence of the drug, I remembered the night I'd hit that girl.

“Of course it was your fault. You were drunk! You had a blood alcohol level of .16%! The legal limit is .10%,” she said firmly. “Fortunately, the girl lived, although she'll never be the same again. One minute she was a beautiful, outgoing young lady about to marry her childhood sweetheart and graduate from Columbia University with a degree in History. The next she is a broken and deformed mass of tissue lying helplessly in bed all day long.”

I swallowed hard, my mouth dry from a combination of the drug and Dr. Brickle's tirade.

“I'm really sorry. I wrote a note to her parents apologizing. I paid the price. I spent 30 days in jail and the last year on probation. They even took away my driver's license for 2 years!” I mumbled.

“Not enough, 233. That beautiful girl lost her left arm, her hips are shattered, and her face was dragged along the pavement until it was a piece of raw meat. She's toothless and can't open her mouth for more than a few seconds without drooling. Oh yes, and her fiancée dumped her. No, 233, I'm afraid that 'I'm sorry' just won't be sufficient for what you did to my sister!”

I remember thinking, “Her sister? Oh shit, what am I in for now?”

“My maiden name was Sheila Zelinski. Michelle is the baby of the family, and now you're going to pay the price for hurting my baby sister,” she said as she pulled up a chair.

“Wha...what are you gonna do? Turn me over to Lozari's goons?” I asked, helpless to do anything in defense.

“No, no, no. I'm a doctor with a job to do. I take my responsibilities very seriously. I'm going to make sure the bad guys can never find you or hurt you. You, Mr. Bronson, are going to get the perfect disguise. This will be my way of doing my job, and at the same time, making you pay for what you did to my sister.”

She excused the assistants, and settled back into the chair, a thick folder with my number on it in her lap. In the dim room lighting I could see the evil smile play across her face, as though she were amusing herself with some private joke.

She began slowly, itemizing the various treatments and 'procedures' I was to receive over the next several weeks. At first I listened intently, disbelievingly. Then, as my growing drowsiness took greater and greater control, I lost dominion over my emotional restraint.

The last thing I remember is the sound of her voice droning on and on, and the sound of my voice...screaming endlessly 'til unconsciousness rescued me!

“Mia Madre! Ees bee-zy tonight!” my friend Maria said to me in broken English.

“Quisiera un vermut una cerveza, por favor?” she said to Tommy the bartender as she lit yet another of her thin black Tiparillo's.

I could see that she was having a good night. Following her 6 twenty minute sessions of topless dancing, Maria was working the customers at the tables for drinks and whatever else she could get. I knew that it was just a matter of time before she left with some appliance salesman from Pomona. I also knew that the vermouth and beer she ordered were watered down and overpriced. That's how Club Galaxy made it's dough.

Maria and I have been roommates and friends ever since we got out of the Witness Protection Program together two years ago. They first set us up in L.A. as housekeepers in Van Nuys hotel, but we got sick of that real quick. Maria quit first and went to work as a housekeeper for a rich family in Encino, and shortly after that I got a better paying job with 'Midnight Encounter Telephone Fantasies'.

Then, about 8 months ago, Dr. Brickle showed up at the small apartment we both shared in North Hollywood, and told us we had to take new jobs. She said that it was for our own good!

That's how we ended up at Club Galaxy. Maria as a dancer, and I am a cocktail waitress on the 6 p.m. to 4 a.m. shift. I only make about \$275 a week, but Maria is doing real good. What with turning tricks and such, she's bringing in about \$1200 every week. Of course, by the time we each payoff the owner of the club, Dr. Brickle's brother, Vincent, we only have a couple hundred between us!

Even though Maria has become a hooker and topless dancer, in many ways she came out much luckier than me. As part of her new identity, they wiped out her mem-

ory of having been a powerful man in the drug running business. This wasn't compassion on their part.

In their investigation, the feds discovered that Maria, who used to be named Daniel Moran, had firsthand knowledge of the Vice-President's involvement in trading drugs for guns in Central America. The order came down: Protect the Veep.

As a result, Daniel Moran, the tall, wealthy, Irish-American drug running pilot was radically transformed into a Mexican immigrant named Maria Conchita Angelena Gonzalez! I later learned it was the first day I met her that the memory wiping treatments had begun. Since that day, they not only gave her the body of a 22 year old Spanish temptress, but the mind as well.

At 5'4", Maria was every inch a beauty. Her long, jet black hair hung in waves to her sloping shoulders, and her firm 36C breasts and 35" hips seemed to have a mind of their own as they bounced and rolled around her 21" waist!

Those bastards had taken all her memories and experiences as a man away from her, and left in their place someone who barely spoke enough English to get by, and believed she was the only orphan daughter of a Mexican family killed in a bus crash when she was 4.

Like I say, she was the lucky one!

"Hey, Tiffany! Stop fuckin' daydreaming and pick up your order!"

Vincent Zelinski, the aforementioned owner, wasn't one for subtlety. I watched as Maria sashayed her way back to her 'customer', and turned my attention once again to the drink order I'd placed.

"They wanted two gin and tonic's and three Miller Lite's. You got it backwards, Tommy!" I said as the table of loud drunken guys yelled at me to hurry with their booze.

"Don't you use that tone of voice with me, bitch. You ain't nothin' but a pair of tits in a tight outfit, so don't go gettin' uppity!" He yelled back, sharply poking his finger into my right boob for emphasis.

I tugged my black spandex dress back down over my ass cheeks for the umpteenth time tonight in a losing effort to maintain some degree of modesty.

"How much longer can I stand this?" I ask myself again and again, still longing for the life I used to have as Glen Bronson. I want to see my girlfriend Delia again. I want to feel the thrill of sliding my pulsating cock into her and hearing her passionate moans of ecstasy. I want to...oh, here come the tears again.

I deliver the drinks to the table of rowdys, accept in silence the obligatory rub on the ass and hand on my tit, and then rush into the small, dirty women's room.

I enter the stall and close the door, once again looking into the nearly full length mirror hung on the back of the door.

"Why did I have to see Lozari kill that guy?" I ask myself for the millionth time as I hike my skintight dress up around my 38" hips.