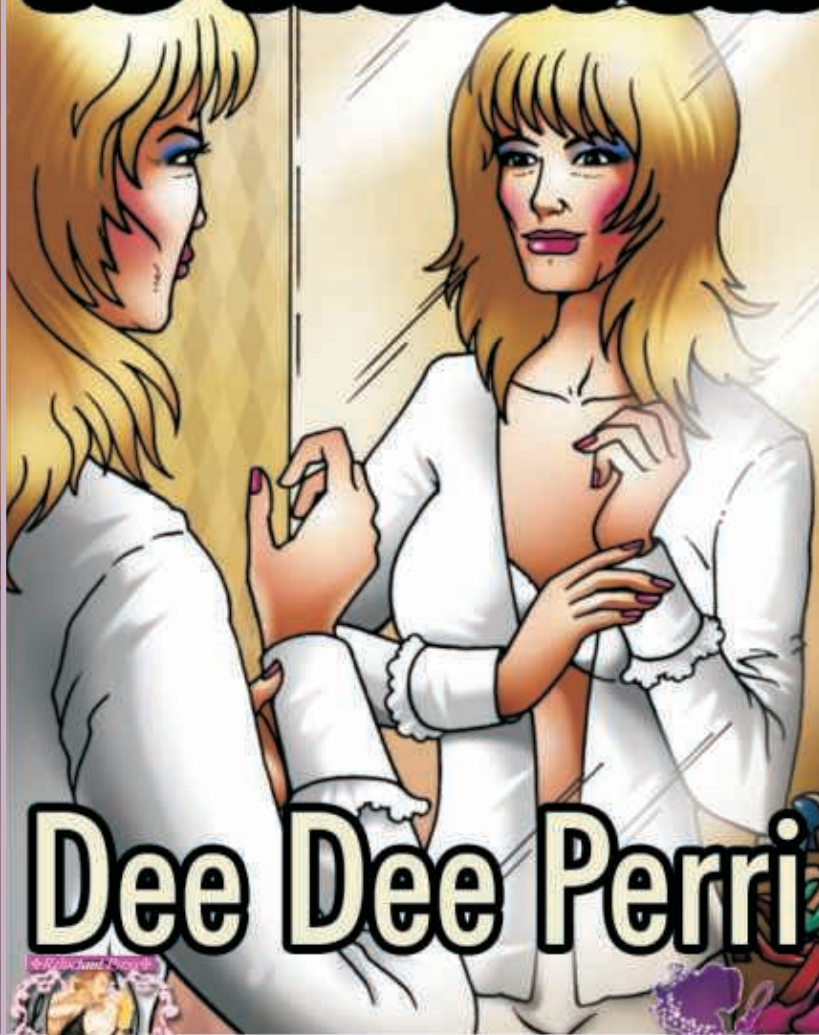


Only Saints Go To Heaven



Dee Dee Perri



An "Adult Tv" Novel



Mags, Inc/Reluctant Press TG Publishers

This story is a work of fiction; any similarity to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental. All situations and events herein presented are fictional, and intended only for the enjoyment of the reader. Neither the author nor the publisher advocate engaging in or attempting to imitate any of the activities or behaviors portrayed.

For more, visit reluctantpress.com or magsinc.com.

Protect Professional Fiction on the Internet

We need *your* help! We spend several hundred dollars to edit, illustrate and typeset *each story*. It is important, therefore, that everyone works to help keep professional fiction alive on the Net.

The civil penalties for copyright infringement can be severe, including substantial monetary damages, injunctive relief, and liability for attorneys' fees incurred in prosecuting a case. In addition, criminal penalties may be imposed if someone willfully infringes a copyrighted work for commercial advantage or private financial gain.

Mostly, though, we just want to be able to keep offering this service to our authors and our readers.

Report stolen books by using the contact form at reluctantpress.com or call us at 800-359-2116

Thank you.

Only Saints Go To Heaven

By Dee Dee Perri

Chapter 1

“Mr. Mugworthy?”

“Ma’am?” The man, short, slender, and pale as an undertaker’s charge, paused. Though his cup was still only half full, he straightened up, turned away from the coffee urn and gave the older woman his full attention. His thin, bloodless lips tightened into what might have passed for a smile or possibly incipient heartburn as his eyes met and held those of the matron in whose house he lived. His dark, deep set orbs, that would have sat comfortably in the face of a starving nineteenth century romantic poet, were now unreadable black pools.

Mrs. Bone, A.K.A. Widow Bone, was the very antithesis of her name. From her sagging jowls to her enormous hips and thick thighs, there was a grand surplus of flesh. Indeed it was one watermelon-sized breast that quivered but a centimeter from Mr. Mugworthy's right elbow that caused him to step back even as he raised the half-empty cup to his lips. "The new guest." The landlady whispered softly as if by that effort alone her communication would remain private.

She was referring to the latest member of the boarding house, realized Mr. Mugworthy. As long as the weekly rent was paid on time, they were all "guests" to Widow Bone. "Ah-Yes?"

"What are your impressions, Mr. Mugworthy? Of Mr. Peerless, that is."

James Mugworthy knew better than to answer a question such as that. In a small village such as Pine Creek, one's own words had a habit of returning but only after having passed from lip to ear of all too many (often to the very ears of the entity in question). The fact was he'd not had a sufficiency of opportunity to form a solid impression of the new roomer, even though they shared a common wall. Though, if the truth be known, what impressions he had formed, hastily of course, were decidedly dark. There was something "off," that is to say wrong, entirely wrong, with the gentleman. He was an outsider, naturally, and probably even a foreigner- there was something in his speech that suggested to Mugworthy that English wasn't Mr. Peerless' native tongue. But there was more to those negative impressions than that. A *slithering-ness*, a multi-limbed essence, like a cockroach perhaps. "Ma'am?" he responded. Answering a question with a question was always the safest response in a situation like this.

“He’s a professional man, a teacher like yourself,” she added, then tipped her head to the side expectantly.

James Mugworthy shrugged. “If he’s looking for employment...” He let the sentence hang unfinished. Pine Creek was dying. Indeed the village had been slowly expiring ever since the gold in the mines had been depleted and that was decades earlier. Both the elementary and middle school in Pine Creek had closed several years earlier. The local children were bussed down the mountain now. The senior high school, all thirty-seven students, continued to exist only because the state senator for the district had the seniority in Sacramento to defend and support the largest employer in town, the Pine Creek High School. Seven teachers and one principal; possibly the lowest student to faculty ratio in the state. The rest of California might have a teacher shortage, but not Pine Creek. “I think not, Mrs. Bone. Even if he is a *very* good teacher.”

She thrust out her lower lip, a habit she had when attempting to extract something from her flawed memory. Then she smiled when she discovered her search hadn’t been in vain after all, “Um, science and math. That should be worth something Mr. Mugworthy, shouldn’t it?”

“Mrs. Bone, that is what *I* teach.”

“Oh... yes, of course Mr. Mugworthy.”

“And I have no plans to leave Pine Creek in the near future.”

“Certainly not, Mr. Mugworthy.” She blushed, being somewhat flustered. “What I meant was...” And then a deeper realization dawned in her eyes. “Oh... dear,” she murmured under her breath.

James Mugworthy knew perfectly well what his landlady had been trying to learn. The new boarder would likely have a very brief tenure in this house, short of find-

ing some other vocation. He re-filled his cup as the landlady turned slowly away.



James Mugworthy had just settled into his easy chair. The late afternoon sun, now sliding below the horizon, had filled the sky with wispy clouds of pink and the light, now more orange than yellow, spilled through the side window and illuminated the far wall of his “apartment” as he fingered open the novel he had chosen for the evening. Mrs. Bone’s overly-dry brisket of beef sat comfortably in his stomach and he was at peace with the world. It would be another six weeks before school would re-open and there was more than ample time for leisure and self-reflection. A hint of a self-satisfied smile crossed his lips as he took in his simple accommodations. An antique four-poster bed stood at one end of the room with a matching chest and armoire. At the other end, where he currently lazed at his leisure, a high-backed leather reading chair, an old-fashioned reading lamp, and rag carpet completed his “setting room.” Two walls had built-in bookcases and these were adequately filled with both books unread or, as was the case of his current novel, books worthy of re-reading. He had all the creature comforts he desired.

He took pride in the fact that he was a man of modest requirements or, as he would have said if anyone had asked, he was a man of *moderation*. The comfortable position at the high school more than met his economic needs. And living in Mrs. Bone’s boarding house wasn’t just financially economical, it was effortless; no shopping or cooking or even cleaning. It hadn’t always been like that. Not when he lived in the ‘flatlands’ as he referred to the rest of Southern California. Then it had been scurry here,

run there. All a constant motion. And for what? A roof over one's head? A career? Love?

Ah, there was the rub. One could only achieve this level of moderation as a bachelor, hmmm? One relationship and the next thing one knew, the rat race was on. No. One very painful divorce and then four delightful years in Pine Creek had convinced him that he'd not trade this existence for any other. He opened the book and began to read.

The near perfection of his setting was abruptly and rudely interrupted about an hour after sunset by a knocking at his door. "Yes?" he said, his thumb now holding his place in the book. The interloper knocked yet again. Now irritation bled into his voice. "Yes, Mrs. Bone, what is it?"

A muffled reply. A man's voice.

A cold chill worked its way down Mr. Mugworthy's spine. It had to be the new roomer. Grudgingly, he got up, book still in his hand. "Whatever," he muttered.

"Yes?" He hissed like one of the diamondbacks that were ubiquitous to the mountains in which the village was situated. Hearing no reply he opened the door and glared.

It was the "new guest" as expected, for who else could it be, but what was not expected was the plate of brownies held out as an offering. "Oh," mumbled Mr. Mugworthy as his eyes were held enthralled by the treat. In spite of himself, spittle welled up in his mouth. At last he pulled his eyes away from the plate and in a softer, less threatening voice, said, "Yes, Mr. Peerless? What seems to be the..."

The man's thick eyebrows rose and fell independently before smiling. "It seems I made too much of this." When Mr. Mugworthy didn't immediately respond, he continued. "Cooking, its one of my hobbies and I can assure you

..." He stammered to a halt and extended an open hand. "My Christian name is Simon."

Mr. Mugworthy echoed back, "Simon," but ignored the hand thrust toward him, an obvious invitation to shake.

The stranger finally retrieved his hand and dropped it toward his side before continuing. He seemed insensitive to the obvious rebuff he'd just received. "Yes and Mrs. Bone said your Christian name is... ah- James? Correct?"

Mr. Mugworthy nodded.

The other man shrugged, "I mean... well considering that we're neighbors. Mr. Mugworthy and Mr. Peerless seems so... *formal* you know?"

Frankly, James Mugworthy saw no problem nor any cost to formality. "Mr. Peerless, would you like to, ah, come in?" His eyes were now fixed on the treats that were held just out of reach.



The first bite went down effortlessly; indeed it bloomed all sweet and chocolaty as a well-made and fresh brownie should and the brownie, still radiating heat acquired from its tenure in the oven, gave off a smell that was intoxicating to James. The thick layer of chocolate frosting which obviously had been applied after the treat had been removed from the oven only enhanced the experience. His lips smacked in pleasure and he would have emitted a small, delightful groan except that he caught himself in time and chose to offer a slight nod of his head to show his approval instead. It wouldn't be seemly to react with too much appreciation; it would only encourage his guest's obvious social agenda.

Simon Peerless sat on the small wooden side chair near the door, the only chair aside from the leather easy chair upon which now rested his host in this small bedroom. Simon's posture was that of an expectant father waiting for the announcement of the arrival of his first child or perhaps that of a condemned man hoping for a reprieve from the governor. Simon's obvious tension was far too excessive to be that driven by his concerns of success or failure in his cooking effort. As he watched his victim swallow that first bite, his posture adjusted ever so slightly, as if the most difficult or dangerous part were now complete. "Well?" he said with obvious tightness in his voice.

"Nice," said Mr. Mugworthy as he held up the remnant of the rectangular segment of brownie as if in salute to his unexpected benefactor. "Very nice and very kind of you, I might add, Mr. Peerless." He looked as if he was about to say something more but decided that the next sweet bite was more relevant. Relief bloomed on his guest's face as James shoved nearly the whole remaining piece of brownie into his mouth and began to chew in obvious pleasure.

"I'm delighted you find it adequate, James." Simon's eyes searched his victim's face looking for a sign. It was much, much too soon, of course. Days might pass before even the slightest hint of success bloomed; the man was, well, a man, a human being with a complex central nervous system unlike the parrotfish from which the key enzyme had initially been isolated. Thirty years he'd waited for this moment. He could certainly wait a few more days. It was, after all, an experiment, the outcome of which was not and could not be certain. He shook his head in an effort to snap back to the here-and-now. He was placing everything, his whole life, on the line, this was no time for

wool gathering. He snatched away the plate of brownies and stood up. "Thank you for your time, James."

As he turned away, he couldn't help noticing that look of loss in Mugworthy's eyes, "Please take another, no, all of them if you like," he smiled.

Relief was evident in Mr. Mugworthy's eyes, "Um, don't mind if I do, ah, Simon. And, ah, a pleasant evening to you sir, a very pleasant evening indeed."



Simon Peerless was far too excited to sit in his room and the summer evening was young. He soon found himself standing in the backyard looking up at Mr. Mugworthy's window. The yellowish light from the man's reading lamp spilled out upon the lawn though the man himself was not visible from this angle. Simon lit a cigarette and then worked his way to the very rear of the yard where he found a comfortable outcrop of rocks upon which to sit and keep vigil. Thirty years almost exactly, he mused. He had been twenty-five at the time and one of the Soviet Union's scientific wunderkin: Ph.D. from the University of Moscow at the age of sixteen, five years of post-docs in Western European Universities and finally, as expected, a position at the Pavlov Institute.

After only three years at the Institute he had established himself as a scientific force to be reckoned with; he had his own laboratory by then and an extensive staff. Perhaps he had gone too far too fast. By and large the people who controlled the Institute were old and set in their ways. Concepts that were modern back in the nineteen-twenties and thirties and nearly abandoned by the West by the late Sixties, still reigned supreme at the Insti-

tute. That was one of the many problems created by having politics deeply embedded into the scientific structure.

Too much psychology and not enough neuroscience, he'd said. Physiology matters. It's the brain we must understand not mere conditioning. *Mere conditioning*? Gads, he had been so full of himself back then. Pavlov's theories formed the quintessential model of communist thinking in the old U.S.S.R., the alpha and the omega of the science of behavior. The words *mere conditioning* had probably set him on the slippery slope of destruction even though the ax hadn't fallen for almost another year.

He was Doctor Petra Ivonovich, winner of numerous scientific awards, and he could do no wrong. No, after years of quiet self-reflection, Petra now realized that he had been merely a young man whose early and admittedly brilliant successes had gone to his head. During his last year at the Institute, he had been working with parrotfish, or rather the enzymes that they possessed. The parrotfish's ability to rapidly change sex was more than just a physical manifestation; that transformation extended to every aspect of the animal's *behavior*. They were changed to that appropriate to the opposite sex, utterly. His attempt to extend his work with mice proved to be a failure, or so it seemed at first blush. Male mice remained male and female mice remained female. There wasn't much sexual dimorphism in mice to begin with, at least to human eyes. No obvious secondary sexual features like the chronic oversized breasts observed in sexually mature human females that marked them as 'female' or the striking color variations between the genders in the parrotfish. Even size wasn't a reliable feature by which to determine the individual's sex. One had to hold up a mouse by the tail and examine the genitals to 'sex' the individual. The enzyme had had no apparent effect on that aspect of his test subjects. Had he simply shrugged his shoulders and

turned away from that initial failure, things might have worked out quite differently for him. Experiments create data and hypotheses often must be rejected and that's the very essence of science and an extension of a specialized mechanism found in fish, a specific species of fish to be more exact, to a mammalian species? Such a failure was not remarkable. But he hadn't, of course, turned his back on his initial hypothesis.

Most of the test animals were destroyed as was standard procedure at the Institute. The females could have been re-introduced into the main mouse colony but to what purpose? A new adult female would cause little disturbance in the highly structured male-dominated community. The Alpha male would check her out to determine whether or not she was in heat but beyond that he would show little interest in her arrival, unless she was in heat of course. Indeed, the lowest-ranking male in the colony was dominant over all of the females. Like the males, females also had a social pecking order but, unlike the males, physical confrontation was not typically observed, thus the new female would simply become just another member of the colony. To be in estrus was the one and only time a female had a significant impact on the male-dominated community and it was during that brief period that the male pecking order really mattered. The Alpha male got first dibs.

But insert a new male into that community? The Alpha male would come off his mound to inspect the intruder. At the first hint that the alien was male, all hell would break out after a brief sequence of threat behavior. The Alpha male would attack. Such attacks could be to the death. For the new male it was fight and win, fight and die, or *run*. And if he ran, he would then have to deal with each and every male in the hierarchy, from the second-ranked mouse on down to the least dominant male or

until he fought and won a place in the social order. It might take days for the new male to find his social position, assuming that he survived all those encounters. The introduction of an 'altered' male into the colony would offer an acid test as to the true sexuality of the test subject, that was clear. It was a test that took little effort and was there for the taking. The results were dramatic, enough said?

It was Petra's request to obtain some human subjects, prisoners, preferably with non-violent histories, to extend these unexpected results that had been the straw that had finally broken his personal camel's back. Dr. Korsakov, then the head of the Institute, had accused him, Ivonovich, of a rabid 'counter-revolutionary' agenda. Well, his research hypothesis was certainly anti-Pavlovian, but it was hardly counter-revolutionary. Besides, he had data, right? Science is based upon data. Wrong! Petra had spent most of the following six years in Siberia as a non-person doing hard labor and he had had plenty of time to consider and re-consider the fundamental issues involved in his research, though for the life of him he never did discover why this data was counter-revolutionary. How could data be anything but data?

Petra understood that had the Soviet Union not collapsed early in the nineteen-nineties, he would probably still be there in Siberia, assuming, of course, that he was alive and the latter was certainly not a given. He put out his cigarette and quickly lit another one.

In nineteen-eighty-five he had been within days of conducting his human experiment. So close and yet so far. Imagine the opportunities for discovery, for insight. That huge, complex, human cortex. Ironic when one considers the fundamental issues. Humans were the best, most logical choice to 'prove' or at least to test the adequacy of the core assumption of the Pavlovian-Soviet model, the su-

premaxy of nurture over nature. Not to mention the advantages provided by a human subject's ability to communicate their thoughts and feelings. Instead he'd faced a handpicked panel of his peers and later, almost as an afterthought, a people's court. He looked up at the window where his subject sat. Of course he wasn't here only to find closure, though that was the most significant part of his motive. Had he sacrificed his professional career for a flawed hypothesis? He had to know.

When he finally emigrated to the United States in the late Nineties, the West had not received him with open arms. Indeed he could still have been a non-person. His Ph.D. was recognized but his scientific work had never been published. The Soviet Union had not been an open community. Such work as he had been doing had been distributed only to a small inner circle of researchers and interested party officials. Probably, after his sentencing, his reports had been destroyed or at least buried in the vast Party archives. To the Western community he was but another 'unpublished' Russian researcher fleeing a failed empire.

He eventually found a teaching position at Pasadena City College in Pasadena California; six times the teaching load of a 'real' college, a small office on campus, extensive committee obligations and nothing more. No laboratory, no funds to even attempt to create a laboratory and decidedly no encouragement to do so by the so called 'college' administration; their faculty were *teachers*, first, last and always. Research? It was actively *discouraged*. And so, for another decade, he'd had to merely reflect on what might have been, what he might have accomplished. At fifty-five, he was no longer that wunderkin but a bitter, middle-aged man, a teacher lecturing to children and child-like adults who had little interest in learning and virtually no understanding of basic science. Petra was in

his own version of Hell. Professionally he could still be in Siberia.

Five years ago, using his own money, he'd begun assembling a laboratory in his small apartment; not a behavioral laboratory, of course, that would require too much space, but a basic biochemistry facility. He didn't need hundreds of parrotfish to obtain the enzyme, a synthesis of the basic factor was far more realistic. He knew exactly what he needed and how to accomplish the task, initially it was mostly money, or the lack of it, that slowed his progress to a snail's pace.

The synthesis of the enzyme proved elusive. He could produce it, to be sure, but in such miniscule quantities as to make the entire project prohibitively expensive. He had been at a dead end, or so he had thought. He began drinking and more or less lost focus for some time, months to be more accurate. His lab were neglected, his samples unattended in the refrigerator. That would have been the end of the enterprise had it not been for a power failure one very hot July weekend, a crust of long forgotten bread and a fallen test tube in his refrigerator.

A simple mold was growing inside the test tube, now trailing a long tenuous connection to the scrap of bread. There was evidence of the enzyme at the bottom of the test tube, more than had been there before.

The mold was producing the enzyme! Though poorly. Excited, Petra began searching for way to encourage the mold's continued growth and was soon rewarded. Milk, sugar water and then finally, raw liver. Soon he would have an ample supply of that exotic enzyme and once again he could dream his dream.

But long before he was ready, he knew the problem he would have finding subjects or even a subject. No, that wasn't the only problem. He would never be given the

authority to perform such an experiment on another human being even if he found a person or persons willing to have a *behavioral sex-change*. There were, of course, people desirous of a physical change of sex, but that he couldn't offer. One didn't have to study the literature very closely to determine the 'wrongness' of *that* concept. *A woman trapped in a man's body was one thing but a man who wanted a woman trapped inside his body?* Such a person was very, very unlikely to exist. So the subject would not, probably could not, be a volunteer. Thus Mr. Simon Peerless was invented. He would conduct Petra's experiment and then vanish, never to appear again. After the experiment was completed, Petra Ivonovich, an obscure 'teacher' of Psychology in an even more obscure community pseudo-college located in a large city which was itself part of a megacity would be as invisible as that proverbial needle in a haystack.

It would be dangerous to attempt to conduct such an experiment on campus or in any setting in which Dr. Ivonovich might be even remotely connected. Somewhere like Pine Creek, one of a number of mountain retreats popular with L.A. residents especially during the hottest periods of the summer came to mind. The town itself was tiny; fewer than a thousand souls maintained year-round residence and yet, for a few months every year, three to four times that number would appear to escape the summer heat in the flatlands; strangers, tourists vastly outnumbered locals. Not that Petra had actually chosen Pine Creek; it simply was the only mountain community in which he had found a room without the need to make a reservation. Mrs. Bone had been only too happy to accept cash. So it would seem that fate and nothing more had placed Mr. Mugworthy into Petra's eager hands.

And indeed Mr. Mugworthy was nearly perfect. A social recluse: stiff, formal and, well, decidedly unfriendly.

Had he been otherwise, Petra would have continued to look for another candidate. No indication of homosexual inclinations, nor feminine traits for either would have ruled out his serving as an unwitting subject. There was also the lack of social commitments; he was, as Mrs. Bone had offered, divorced and hadn't shown the slightest inclination to 'date' in the four years he had been living in her boarding house. That was icing on the cake, or rather, on the brownie. A non-active heterosexual, approximately middle thirties and in apparent good health... well the die had already been cast.

Petra looked up at the star-filled sky as a flurry of anxiety bloomed in his gut. It was a little late to worry but the town was also a *trap*. A single, long, narrow mountainous road connected Pine Creek to the world. Need he leave in a hurry, were things to go wrong, horribly wrong, escape would be difficult if not impossible. "Da," he said to the star-filled night sky. It wouldn't be the first time he'd risked literally everything merely to explore a hypothesis. One thing was certain, he would leave as soon as he had the data. Perhaps as early as tomorrow night. And then what? It rather depended upon the data, didn't it? At least he would finally have closure and that was worth a lot.



Petra got little sleep that night. With every random sound coming from the next room, he would jerk awake, sometimes placing his feet on the cool hardwood floor, ready to spring into action, then sit there motionless as he listened and tried to decode what the sound or sounds meant. This was no way to conduct behavioral research. By rights he should have Mr. Mugworthy under constant surveillance; at a minimum a continuous audio-video record would be made that could be studied later. Given the

new technologies, an fMRI would be a lovely tool to have, an open window into an active brain. "Da," he muttered softly to himself. Like that was going to happen. To do this properly would take more money than he would ever have and at least a modest staff of co-workers, a lab, a real facility and yes, support from the local authorities. To do it right he would have had perhaps several dozen subjects each with carefully annotated histories both behavioral and medical. And control groups in a double blind situation. He was no objective, independent observer, he knew that all too well. He might see what he wanted to see, especially if the effects of the enzyme were subtle or worse, non-existent.

He was up and dressed at first light but he remained in his room, waiting for his subject to awake. Finally, after more than an hour and a half dozen cigarettes, relief bloomed; he heard movement in the next bedroom. He was there casually standing in his open doorway when his subject finally opened his door. "Good morning, James."

James, still in his bathrobe with a towel slung over his shoulder and a shaving kit in his hand, wrinkled his nose. "You've been smoking in your room," he said, a statement, not a question. "Mrs. Bone does not tolerate smoking in her house." He flung this last comment out in a huff, not once giving Petra eye contact nor even acknowledging the greeting. He continued down the hall toward the bathroom at the other end of the structure looking neither to the right nor left, then entered the bathroom, closing the bathroom door firmly behind him. The sound of metal on metal followed as James locked the bathroom door.

Petra stood there, open-mouthed, for a second. One thing was certain, Mr. Mugworthy's behavior was, as yet, unaltered. He opened the door to Mr. Mugworthy's room

and gave it a quick inspection. Nothing seemed out of order; indeed the bed was already made. Even the book the man had been reading last night had been returned to its shelf. He stared at the bookcase for a few seconds not fully aware of why it caught his interest. Then he realized, each and every book was ordered alphabetically, first by author, then by title. What kind of person does that? He let out a long sigh and headed down to the dayroom where Mrs. Bone would have her coffee service set out.



James Mugworthy was very unsettled by the time he completed his morning toilet. His initial impressions of the new boarder hadn't improved at all, in fact, they had declined precipitously. That negative feeling he'd first felt about the man had sharpened into sincere distaste. The man's attempts to establish a social relationship with him last night had felt like, well, a feeling not unlike one might experience with a used car salesman. Too warm, too friendly and too... insincere: a lie, a horrid deception with probable criminal intent. That man was in the very next room, but inches away from James' room was too close for comfort; it was almost an intolerable situation. And then there was the smoking. He would make it a priority to inform Mrs. Bone about Mr. Peerless' filthy behavior. That thought had, for a moment, brought a grim smile to his face. Indeed he would call that fact to Mrs. Bone's attention, immediately.

But that was but the start of Mr. Mugworthy growing discomfort. He was not a particularly hairy man, in fact, he had but a small rift of hair near the center of his chest. He was quite familiar with that small island of foliage. His ex-wife had frequently played with it just before they made love. It was not something to be ashamed of and yet

for some reason, today, at this very moment, it seemed wrong, out of place. More like a blemish than not. James was not one to be overly concerned about his body; that is to say, he had little concern about his appearance other than to be, well, presentable. He had no social ambitions regarding the fairer sex, not to say that he was utterly sexless. He did, after all, regularly visit Miss Jill Colbert's establishment at the other end of High Street. Female companionship was readily available there, especially this time of year when Miss Jill supplemented her 'staff' for the heavy summer tourist trade. Such 'social contacts' only required money to be completed and Jill ran a very respectable and clean whore house. The more he fingered his tuft of coarse hair, the more uncomfortable he became with it until, finally, he picked up his razor and put in a new blade. He knew what he was going to do next but not why. That hair had never bothered him before, so why today?

Twenty minutes later, he finally climbed out of the bathtub. Hair, lots of hair, floated on the surface and clung to the side of the tub. Far too much hair, to be entirely honest. Having shaved his chest, he'd found yet more unwanted, undesired coarse body hair. There had been something almost insane that had taken a hold of him, quite out of character. He ran his hands across his body and then, finally down his legs. He'd removed it all. Why?

A frightening, mindless compulsion, that's what it had been. He now felt, well, clean-er whereas before he had been dirty? This disturbed him greatly and why shouldn't it, he was a man of moderation, correct? A compulsive disorder was the very antithesis of his need for order and moderation, or perhaps not. He threw down that razor in self-disgust before turning back to clean up the mess he had made. He was very, very unsettled indeed by the

time he headed back to his room to dress. The day was not starting out very well at all and the lingering smell of Mr. Peerless' tobacco smoke didn't improve his attitude.

His stepmother had commented on more than one occasion that he should have been born a girl. What a waste for a man to have legs as pretty as his, she'd say. That long-forgotten adolescent memory came back to James as he pulled on his walking shorts. Perhaps it was the fact that his legs were freshly-shaved but he had to admit as he stood before the mirror on his bedroom door that they were quite attractive. Much prettier than his ex-wife's legs had been. Like so many women, Karen had had thick thighs and those thighs wobbled when she walked. He would never have such a problem. Nor were his legs corded with muscle as was so common in men. Smooth, rounded and now soft to the touch, utterly hairless. He bent over, slightly sliding his hands over and around his thighs. An uncharacteristic but yet pleasant tingle bloomed. He continued and the pleasure became more certain and that certainty began to evoke a very old and very familiar feeling. His penis began to engorge and was already demanding similar attention. Alarm followed and James jerked his hands away and stood up. What was happening to him, more weirdness? Touching his own legs, a turn-on? Or rather his freshly-shaved legs. There was no doubt that the very feminine aspect they had acquired had made a connection to his own erotic tendencies. He stood there debating whether or not to complete what he had started: to masturbate or not to masturbate? Ah, that was the question.

Minutes later, he climbed off his bed and remade it. He looked in the mirror, his face was flushed, needless to say. It had been a long time since he'd given in to that urge to 'spill his seed' as his step-mom would have said. Perhaps it had been too long since he had visited Miss

Jill's establishment, apparently much too long. But the manner by which he had inadvertently excited himself was too strange to think about. And therein lay a problem. It was going to be hot today and wearing shorts had made sense but that was before what he had just experienced. The feminine impression his shaved legs created in him was simply intolerable. James rolled his eyes. He removed the shorts and pulled on a pair of jeans, comfort wasn't everything after all.

More time passed as he stood there before the mirror. He'd left the short-sleeved heavily-starched white shirt hanging out over his pants and fiddled with the buttons. There was something terribly wrong happening inside him, starting with the compulsion to shave his entire body and going downhill from there. He leaned forward to more closely inspect his face. It wasn't a bad face, though not exactly handsome by male standards. He had rather small features to be sure. His dark eyes were certainly his best trait, so what was wrong? He half-expected a crazed mad man to be returning his gaze from the mirror, but it was his face and his eyes showed concern rather than madness. This morning had been a clusterfuck ever since he had awakened. His last thoughts as he finally left the room revolved back to the beginning of his morning. "Mr. Peerless," he growled softly. With any luck the man would have had his coffee and, perhaps, be gone? It was almost too much to hope for.

And it was too much to hope for. At the top of the stairs he stopped at the sound of that man's voice. It was obvious he was talking to Mrs. Bone. Worse, he was apologizing for smoking in the house. Damn, thought Mr. Mugworthy, that was one arrow he wouldn't be able to fire. He remained standing there until the conversation ended, then proceeded slowly down the stairs.

“Good morning, Mrs. Bone.” She said something in reply but James wasn’t listening, she seldom had anything worth hearing so he just nodded as if in agreement. He took a Styrofoam cup rather than the fine China mug he usually used, the better to make a hasty retreat if that man were to suddenly re-appear. As James filled the cup, a whiff of cigarette smoke leaked through the open window behind him. Well at least he knew where Mr. Peerless was, outside on the back porch. He moved in the opposite direction, toward the porch at the front of the house but he wasn’t quite quick enough.

“James?”

James’ stomach twisted into a knot but he didn’t look back, nor pause, as he headed toward the front door. He pretended to not have heard the man but that strategy apparently had failed. He heard quick but heavy footsteps on the hardwood floor just behind him. He stopped and let the other man catch up. As he turned and opened his mouth to say that he had things to do, his gaze found and met that of Mr. Peerless. The man had blue eyes, amazingly beautiful blue eyes. That he hadn’t noticed those eyes before seemed, well, to be utterly impossible. Such eyes. Mr. Peerless’ mouth was moving and he was surely speaking to James but the sounds weren’t registering within James’ brain. Indeed nothing in the world was registering except those marvelous, hypnotic orbs. Those eyes seemed to lance directly into James’ very soul, evoking a painful yet delicious sensation. Now James’ mouth was moving as if to reply to Simon’s words but only incoherent tiny sounds issued forth, babble, gibberish. It was a primitive reaction to say the least but if he continued to gaze into those eyes, his very essence would be consumed, or so it seemed.

But a moment before his eminent dissolution, Mrs. Bone intervened; that is to say she called out to Mr. Peer-

less and the blue-eyed man turned his amazing gaze away. James was abruptly free and yet not free. For seemingly an age, an endless moment, James stood still, helpless, immobilized and utterly vulnerable to Mr. Peerless' will if he would but return his gaze back from whence it had moved. Muscles re-connected to nerves and nerves to brain. James turned and ran, sloshing coffee every which way across Mrs. Bones clean hardwood floors but it didn't matter.

He had to run, to escape. And run he did: out the door, across the front porch, down the street until finally, he took a well-worn foot path, up onto the rugged trail that ran above the village. He would not have willingly stopped until he had no breath left nor energy to run for his terror knew no bounds but his whole physical and mental existence seemed to come unglued. He staggered and fell, a loose heap of human flesh alongside the rude trail, now whimpering like a lost child.

Chapter 2

At first they were small, surprisingly heavy and loosely attached to his body, specifically his chest. Initially the size of plums, they grew to the size of baseballs, then oranges, only to overflow his cupped hands, James was holding grapefruits now whose tenuous connection to his chest strengthened even as neural paths stabilized. His brain acknowledged, finally, their existence: breasts. *His* breasts to be exact. They represented a significant mass, especially relative to a much attenuated musculature, shoulders, mere frail blades, arms like matchsticks. Though they had never carried much muscle in Mr. Mugworthy's thirty-six years of life, they had never been quite so feeble. His short-sleeved white shirt had been freshly starched and it was that very stiff harshness that had first compelled him to rip it open some few minutes after the mass on his chest had grown to the size of base-

balls. Highly sensitive nipples screamed in response to the sandpaper-like surface they encountered. Buttons had flown into the brush when he reached down and finally freed those trapped glands. He still stared at the wide, still growing, base of those round but slightly conical breasts. The grossly enlarged nipples wrinkled in the high mountain air as if offering suck to some unseen or unknown infant or lover. Perhaps it was merely the initial tactile stimulation of the starched shirt that had brought them to their current rigid attention.

Had James been on his feet at the moment when the change reached his hips, surely he would have been thrown to the ground. The bones in his pelvis had abruptly opened up like a flower to the light with a sickening sound that was clearly audible. Thigh bones which had once commanded a nearly vertical alignment now dove inward. His knees were now naturally together though since he was already spayed out on the ground, no serious disturbance to his equilibrium had resulted. Except for the hips all this happened, not in an instant, but over many minutes, perhaps as much as a half-hour.

This was no magical transformation; long hair did not sprout from his skull nor did his fingernails lengthen and become painted. All the changes centered around soft tissue, fat and muscle, or the spatial configuration of existing bones. Faster than a adolescent female would experience such 'growth,' perhaps a thousand or even ten thousand times faster, yes, but not instantaneous, not magical. A substantial mass was consumed by the action; his blood pressure and heart rate reflected the tremendous demands upon his biological system. His body temperature had spiked momentarily at a hundred and eight degrees though James had no way of knowing that fact.

He sat on a more fully padded bottom clutching breasts that might weigh seven pounds each, they cer-

tainly felt that heavy. A heavy sheen of sweat covered his body as his heart, still racing, hammered in his ears and his rapid deep breaths attempted to catch up with his need for oxygen. Through all of this, he was barely conscious of the enormous physical changes he'd undergone. It was those eyes, those blue, hypnotic eyes, Mr. Peerless' eyes, that he still saw. Like an old 1950's movie in which the villainous hypnotist strikes out at his victim with electric bolts of energy from his eyes, the effect had been similar on poor James. Something soft, vulnerable and very deep inside him had been touched, changed, as if Mr. Peerless' gaze had stolen his manhood.

But nothing was that simple. That gaze that had ripped into him, destroying what had been was also sweetly exciting. It was similar to the stirring he had felt when he first met his future wife; love or maybe infatuation? But lust too and something else, something entirely new. It had made him feel vulnerable, yes, but pleasantly so as if vulnerability itself were something good? Strange, for the first time he finally understood what motivated those who actually sought to be dominated, to be taken over, overwhelmed and thus no longer responsible, freedom gladly traded for the uncertainty of being possessed by a faithless but ever too precious lover. The desire to willingly give up one's freedom was as alien as willingly accepting death and mutilation, or so it had seemed at the moment to James and thus he had initially fled.

Both James' physical and mental transformations had taken place roughly concurrently. Not surprisingly, it was the mental changes that had taken precedence. James licked fat swollen lips as he adjusted his position on the ground. He let go of the heavy breast he still held in his hand. It dropped and then bobbed in a series of after-shocks, not that he gave it much attention now. It seemed entirely odd to the point of strange, to be sure, but hardly

as strange as the emotions he felt, the fundamental shift in viewpoint.

He was certainly still 'he,' a male. His penis was rock hard and it throbbed insistently inside his pants. His nuts seemed to be tightly drawn up against his body but that was actually normal when he was sexually aroused. In spite of the fact that his mind had just gone over Niagara Falls in a barrel and something had played with his body like it had been made of soft wax, he was as horny as a sixteen-year-old or worse, if there was a worse.

For James it was a homosexual moment which on any other day would have been a momentous event paled beside what he'd just gone through. He was alone and his sexual need was most insistent. In a few moments he had extracted his rigid penis. With one hand, he began to stroke it and with the other he worried and manipulated first one breast, then the other. He pictured a man, not a specific man, just a man, a blurred powerful shape almost in silhouette. He was strong, far stronger than James and his touch was demanding, insistent and not to be refused.

In spite of his pressing need, sexual relief for James was not easily achieved. It was not something he could accomplish on his own, he slowly discovered. The imagined male's presence, his demanding attentions to James' new body was everything. Phantom hands that now violently attacked his fully compliant body succeeded in elevating James arousal *almost* to the point of ejaculation but mere imagination was not... quite... enough.

James would have screamed in frustration had it not been the incipient exhaustion. The massive physical re-adjustment of his body had been expensive indeed. He passed out.



Petra Ivonovich breathed his first sigh of relief as his old Toyota made the last hairpin turn on the long, long twisted drive down the mountainside. There was no police barricade stationed there as the narrow mountain road connected up to the highway that ran along the base of the mountain. His worst fear had not been realized. Mr. Mugworthy had not gone to the authorities or at least the authorities had yet to respond. He was still not entirely free of that iron grip of fear but that grip had loosened considerably.

Fifteen minutes later as his car moved onto the Interstate that would eventually take him back to Pasadena, his concern lessened still more. Enough so that he could finally focus on what had happened. Thank God he had used a false identity. Simon Peerless was safely dead since he had never existed. Petra was certain that he could never survive being incarcerated again. In spite of his displeasure regarding the path his professional life had taken, even Pasadena City College was a thousand times better than prison.

What had gone wrong? Everything, it seemed. Mr. Mugworthy's remarkable and totally unexpected flight out of the boarding house had put a nix to his experiment. His fear was very much in response to my presence, Petra concluded. How or even why had he made such a connection was beyond Petra's current understanding. Had perhaps the enzyme he'd been fed last night made him feel sick?

His ability to conduct his observations on Mr. Mugworthy's behavior had been, needlessly to say, utterly compromised even without the threat of interference from the local authorities. Observing a man who knew he

was being observed, studied, made any data obtained suspect at the very least. But the worst part was there was, as yet, no sign, not even a hint of an effect on that man's behavior other than that insane explosion of mindless terror Petra had witnessed. No outward display of feminine mannerisms which would have been the logical first indication of a reaction to the enzyme. There had been no aggressive inverted sexual posturing as observed in the altered mice toward the dominate males. No, he had simply runaway, screaming as if the very devil were after him. Petra had been Mr. Mugworthy's personal devil. How very odd and unsettling.

Petra flashed back to his initial observations, when the first of many altered males had been introduced into the main colony. The Alpha male had charged down off his mound and then had drawn up short, assuming the threat posture as one would have expected him to do having encountered a male intruder. But the test subject neither responded with a threat posture of his own nor had he run. Instead, he had assumed the receptive posture common to an adult female in esterase: the deeply bowed back, the hindquarters elevated and the tail switched to the side. That the Alpha male had accepted this presentation was most remarkable considering the general evidence that pheromones were the pre-eminent, necessary and sufficient trigger for what the Alpha male did next. He mounted the test subject and, eventually, ejaculated.

That the Alpha male accepted the test subject as a female, no, not just as a female but as an adult female in 'heat' and therefore desirable was the astounding aspect of that test. The hours and days that followed were even more enlightening. All the males treated this altered male not only as female but as if 'he' were in heat. Needless to say, a real female, would be in heat but for a few hours each reproductive cycle. The altered male was not so con-

strained. If there could be a 'queen' in a mouse colony, the enzyme-enhanced male would have qualified. These initial results were replicated many times and without a single failure.

Lacking a vagina, most, if not all the olfactory cues, would have been absent. Was it simply the behavior of the receptive male sufficient in and of itself? Unlikely, but that was what the initial data suggested. Petra assumed that even though humans were unable to see the 'hidden' secondary sexual characteristics, mice were not. One might have to be a mouse to perceive what was 'female' and desirable in another mouse. If only mice could talk.

The country scrolled by as Petra traveled West toward Pasadena. His mind was deeply engaged on the problem. The experiment had staggered and fallen apart before the hypothesis could be tested. Simon Peerless or some other figment of Petra's creation might yet be needed. Nothing had been resolved. Pine Creek had not proven to be an ideal laboratory after all. There would be a next time. Petra gripped the steering wheel more tightly as he stared into the future. He would be better prepared and less vulnerable next time.



Mr. Mugworthy didn't believe in magic; not even as a child had he bought into that concept and yet what had happened to him this morning was so... preposterous as to rule out any logical explanation. No drug, no chemical known to man, could have so radically altered his body. When he regained consciousness a few minutes earlier, it was only by great effort that he was able to remove his jeans. Full hips and an even fuller bottom covered, of course, by his pale white and now soft flesh, could only belong to a female. Even Miss Jill wasn't so amply en-

dowed and she was the most full-figured woman James had ever met. And then there was his penis, where it had always been, looking out of place like a misplaced artifact from another reality, like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz



meeting Schwarzenegger's Terminator skipping down the yellow brick road.

The breasts that thrust out from his chest seemed entirely more in character with the rest of this altered body than did his own groin. It was as if some magical ray had turned him into a woman but had failed in the last instant, leaving behind probably the most significant aspects of his manhood. He reached down and cupped his balls in his hand to confirm for himself that they were still there. There was no doubt as to the presence of his penis; it was still inflamed, swollen and, well, unsatisfied. He forced it back inside his Jockey shorts where it continued to stand uncomfortably erect like a fleshy five-inch signpost pointing forward and slightly toward the right.

He tugged at his white shirt. It was long enough to cover his butt and hide his erection, but not long enough to do both at the same time. As far as covering those ridiculous breasts, there was ample material there now that his chest and shoulders had regressed back to his childhood to do the job. The missing buttons made a mockery of any attempt of modesty on his part, short of holding the shirt closed with his hand, which he did while using his other hand to brush away some of the dirt and dried grass his body had acquired. He looked down at those jeans. Putting them on again was simply not going to happen. White shirt and Jockey shorts were going to have to suffice once he had put his shoes back on. He checked his watch, eight-forty. Which meant he hadn't been unconscious for more than a few minutes.

Less than an hour since Mr. Peerless had stolen his manhood or at least pretty much fucked his manly figure over, that aroused prick argued effectively that there was indeed some male virility remaining. He dropped back behind the bushes, then peered down the trail first to the left from which he'd first come, then to the right. He'd all

but forgotten about Mr. Peerless. That thought instantly triggered the vivid memory of those *enchanted, hypnotic* blue eyes and that weird but exciting, almost girlish helplessness which had gripped him while caught by that astounding gaze. Mr. Peerless had been the rock star, the unattainable sex symbol-object and James, the wildly frenzied worshiper, the teenage girl that would have gladly thrown herself at his feet if only Simon had deemed her worthy of notice. That pretty much summed up the experience well.

He gulped. He'd forgotten about the worst aspect of the whole experience. Mr. Peerless eyes had really, really, really fucked with his brain. He peered back down the trail again. If Mr. Peerless were to suddenly come walking down that trail right now, he, James Mugworthy, heterosexual male and man of moderation, might very likely become one Jimmy-all-purpose-sex-toy, slavishly willing to accept whatever attention that man might deem to offer. Oh, the horror of that and yet... he felt the lingering yearning, the delicious but alien urge to be utterly swept into such a void. He shuddered in spite of the growing warmth of the hot summer sun that would soon burn him to a crisp if he didn't seek shelter soon.

Where would he go? Back to Mrs. Bone's house and Mr. Peerless? That wasn't an option but to be entirely honest, such a destructive act had far more appeal than it should. He was probably unrecognizable to anyone who knew him well enough to take him in and too strangely costumed to amble down Pine Creek Avenue without causing a major public reaction. Between the hot sun which would grow ever hotter as the morning progressed toward noon and his thirst, already palpable, remaining indefinitely on or near the trail above the village was also out.