Ellie eased the car into the parking spot, shifted into "park" and killed the engine. Her body still twitched and shuddered delightfully from the immensely satisfying, refreshing orgasm she had just enjoyed with DJ. That combined with a hearty dinner and a beautiful day sightseeing gave her a feeling of near-euphoric well-being she hadn't experienced in a long while.

Crickets chirped in the bushes and the streetlights buzzed overhead as she fished for her room-key and headed off for the suite she and Zu were sharing. Absently she glanced at her cellphone.

*That's odd,* she thought, *I have a missed call, and I don't recognize the number.* It wasn't DJ's, since his would be local and have the numbers 301 in front of it. This number had 202. Oh, well, she'd call it in a little while. Right now she wanted to get ready for bed.

She yawned as she opened the door to her suite.

A blue glow emanated from beneath the closed bedroom door. Peeking in, Ellie saw an already blanket-covered Zu watching a movie on the television; *Pirates of the Caribbean,* from the looks of it. "I'm back, Zu," she said to Zu's ponytail. Zu simply waved back over one shoulder and continued immersing herself in the TV program.

Cricking her neck, Ellie walked across the darkened sitting-room to her luggage, shedding her clothes as she went. *Let's see here,* she thought, beginning to rummage through her suitcase, *nipple clamps, no . . . vibrator, no . . . anal beads, no . . . um, what the heck is THAT? Anyway, no . . . Shit. Where the hell did I put my nightshirt? AH! Here it is. Now for my toothbrush.*

She finished stripping nude and headed for the shower. She turned on the water and while waiting for it to warm up started brushing her teeth. As she commenced her evening ablutions she couldn't help but stare at her own body in the mirror.

She turned her head to one side and brushed her bangs away from her forehead, then batted her ears and pouted at her own reflection. She cupped her breasts and gave the nipples a squeeze for effect. The tingling sensation was quite pleasant, but she wasn't ready for another orgasm just yet. The day had been very busy, and now she was very tired. With a sigh she resumed her pre-bedtime toiletries. A quick trip through the shower and she was done.

Shrugging on her nightshirt she took her cellphone out of her purse and examined the elapsed call records. There was one for Za, two for Zu, two for DJ and that one mystery number. It had been made about four-thirty that afternoon and whoever had called had left no message on her voicemail. She accessed the number and pressed "call." The line activated and the quiet trill of the other end ringing sounded in her ear. After five rings came the "click" of a connection followed by a man's voice.

"Hello?"

"Yes," replied Ellie. "I'm sorry to disturb you, but I believe you contacted this number earlier, and I am just returning your call?"

The man's voice rose excitedly in pitch. "Is this by any chance Ms. Ellie de Chaton? Ellie de Chaton of Granköping, Sweden?"

Ellie frowned suspiciously. "Why do you wish to know?" she inquired. His voice sounded VERY, VERY familiar but damn it, she *just* couldn't place it.

"I'll answer that question with a question: Does "What Some People Do for Love" ring a bell?"

Ellie gasped, her eyes widening in sudden recognition. "JAY!?" she squealed. "Is that *you!?"*

The man laughed. "Yes, it's me, Ellie. It's Jay! I haven't seen or heard from ya in a little bit longer than I can remember!"

"Oh, WOW!" Ellie was ecstatic. "I can't believe you found me! It's so wonderful hearing from you again! How have you been? It's been ages!"

"I've been fantastic!" replied Jay. "You can't imagine how surprised I was when I learned that you and Zu were travelling to Washington."

"Oh, it's just a little vacation," replied Ellie. "I haven't had one in quite a while. So how did you know we were here?"

"Who do you think approved your visas?" Ellie thought she could detect a chuckle on the other end of the line.

"*You* did? I knew you worked for the Swedish Consulate at the Embassy, but I never knew you had *that* kind of clout."

"Well, I didn't SINGLY approve your visas," admitted Jay. "I just kind of got the ball rolling. Anyway, I got a memo this afternoon with a list of new travel visas printed on it. I recognized your names and addresses, and took the chance you had the same cellphone number as before. So how is the nurse I love so much; the best one in Sweden?"

Ellie blushed. "Actually, it's DOCTOR Ellie now."

"Ya got your certification!" Jay marvelled. "Good job! I always knew ya could."

"I even have my own staff now, so I don't run the clinic all by myself. So how about you? It's been eight years since . . ."

"Since I left?" Jay finished for her, his voice growing sober. "Well, you already know I completed College and got a job at the Swedish Embassy here in Washington, but sometimes I wonder . . ."

"Wonder?"

"Oh, no big deal. I just wonder sometimes if I made the right decision in leaving you, leaving home, leaving all our friends. I mean, I got a great job here, but I hadda start all over in a new place, all alone."

"There's no shame in that," Ellie pointed out. "That's what life is all about: Making decisions. Sometimes they're smart, sometimes not so, but if you can learn from the poor decisions you make and overcome them, then they're not really bad decisions."

"Good point," agreed Jay. There was a long, long pause before he spoke again, a little quieter this time. "I've really missed you, Ellie."

Ellie's eyes misted as she remembered the tall, thin, black-haired catman in whose arms she spent so many meaningful, wonderful nights, so long ago. "I've missed you too, Jay," she murmured.

"I don't want to be forward, but are you doing anything tonight? Maybe you and I could get together to catch up on things."

"Oh gee, you caught me at a really awkward time, Baby," she replied, using the affectionate term for the first time in eight years. "Zu and I did a lot of sightseeing today, and we're REALLY tired."

"Oh, that's okay," replied Jay. "How about tomorrow night? No big deal; just dinner and a nightcap."

"We were going to do some more sightseeing during the day, but . . ." What about DJ? Oh, Ellie was sure he'd understand her being gone for just a single night. " . . . Well, maybe tomorrow night. What time would you like to get together?"

"How about you be ready by five-thirty, and that way, I can pick ya up by six."

"Sounds good."

"Fantastic! See you then. By the way, what's your hotel address?"

Ellie gave it to him.

"Okay, got it. See ya tomorrow night around six! I'm really looking forward to seeing you again."

"Take care, Jay." She hung up the phone, folded it up and put it into her purse. She would have to ask DJ if he would keep Zu company while she was out, but since the two of them were so fond of each other she didn't think it a problem. After all, how late could Ellie stay out?

The noise of the movie suddenly ceased and the blue glow from beneath the door winked out, leaving the suite in darkness. Ellie opened the bedroom door to find Zu already asnooze on her half of the bed. Ellie queued her iPod to *La Nocturne Opus Nine Number Two* by Chopin and settled under the covers, moving slowly in order not to disturb Zu. She lay her head back and immersed herself in the softly-playing music.

She imagined herself and Jay alone on an immense dancefloor, waltzing to the dulcet piano strains of the music. Jay was just as she remembered him, with his lanky frame and his slightly rumpled hair. He was magnificently attired in an ebony tuxedo with golden vest and jet-black shoes polished to a mirror sheen. Ellie was resplendent in a full-length, sky-blue ballgown which highlighted her ivory skin and lustrous golden hair. Jewels twinkled at her breast and in her ears as she grasped Jay's hands in hers. The moonlight set Jay's face aglow and sparkled in Ellie's eyes and her hair as he held her against him. Enraptured, she raised her chin and pressed her lips against his, luxuriating in the strength of his arms, the warmth of his lips and the feel of his breath against her cheek. She pulled away and gazed once again into DJ's deep, soft blue eyes.

Ellie blinked in sudden confusion. DJ? She had been dancing this time with DJ? What on earth had happened? Where was Jay? How did DJ get here? Ellie tried to struggle in alarm and back away from this new, unexpected scenario.

However . . .

DJ took hold of Ellie's shoulder and tenderly laid a comforting hand on her cheek, calming her.

Slowly, confidently, he took her hand in his and placed her other hand on his shoulder. Gently grasping her waist he led her anew in the dance meant just for them.

Ellie's smile returned as they spun and pirouetted together through the cool, velvet nocturnal air, serenaded by the moonlight while the admiring stars gazed down upon them. The joy she felt in DJ's arms was indescribable as she laid her head against his chest and wrapped her arms around him, holding him close, while he did the same to her. Their eyes met again as their lips drew together . . .

. . . Ellie didn't know it, but she was already fast asleep and already deep, deep in dreaming.

-----------------------------------------

"Redline, Cleveland Park," droned the Metro conductor. The train swayed and hissed to a stop at the underground Metro stop. Earlier that morning DJ had decided they change plans, catching the train at the Shady Grove terminus instead of going all the way into Silver Spring. Their destination, the National Zoo.

DJ was clad in his usual street clothing, complete with ball-cap sitting askew on his head while Ellie had chosen more adventuresome garb. She wore what looked like a blue one-piece swimsuit which had been cut VERY high on each thigh and VERY low in front. Her attire avoided being controversial by the addition of a pair of stonewashed jeans and overshirt, with a pair of knee-high boots for a final garnish. DJ was most appreciative when he first laid eyes on her, and was promptly reminded that Ellie's eyes were "Up here, mister!"

Ellie was grateful for finally coming to a halt in the train. She had gotten onboard and had to spend half the trip riding backwards, which forced her stomach to do a slow roll and lurch to the left before DJ gallantly gave her his place.

"You look kind of green," DJ commented, chuckling.

"Now I know how Zu felt on the carousel yesterday," quavered Ellie in reply.

The three of them exited the train and took the stairs to the surface.

"No escalator?" Ellie inquired.

"Nope, not here," replied DJ. "We're too close to the surface, so people just take the stairs. If they're lazy, there's always an elevator."

Zu was perfectly content to walk up the stairway alongside DJ, clasping his arm in both of hers.

*"Jag älskar min pappa!"* she chirped.

"Um Ellie?" DJ inquired, casting a quizzical glance downwards at his young admirer, "is Zu always this affectionate?"

Ellie's eyebrow raised. "Actually, no," she replied. "Oh, Zu is very even-tempered and outgoing, but the only other male person she's been openly affectionate with has been her boyfriend." Her eyes fell slightly. "Let's just say Zu hasn't experienced much in the way of positive reinforcement from men. It's unexplainable how she can still be so cheerful, given all that she's been through."

DJ looked pensive. "She's been through a tough time, huh?'

Ellie simply nodded.

They reached the street level and with DJ leading the way, headed south down the busy, automobile-and-pedestrian crowded thoroughfare of Connecticut Avenue.

The sun was bright, but played hide-and-seek behind enormous, fluffy, grayish-white cumulus clouds, hinting at the possibility of rain, perhaps later on. For the moment however, the breeze blew balmy and cheerful and the crowds seemed to be in pleasant spirits.

The three friends continued their stroll, crossing over a large bridge flanked on both ends by four pairs of enormous lanterns. At the bottom of the forested ravine far, far below joggers and bicyclists rambled through the urban woodland on a disused street, now used as a footpath.

"My goodness, these buildings are huge!" remarked Ellie, staring to their left at the immense edifice flanking the street. "I thought there were no skyscrapers in Washington."

"Buildings?" remarked DJ. "That's just one building, kiddo. That's the "Kennedy-Warren" apartment building. It takes up the entire side of this block. Anyway, you're right about no skyscrapers. Nothing is allowed to be taller than the Capitol Building, so architects build OUT rather than UP. I'm afraid it eats up a lot of real estate. Anyway, here we are: The National Zoo."

Two gargantuan bronze lions stood guard flanking the broad walkway entrance while the enormous metal letters of the word "ZOO" eliminated any doubt as to the identity of the establishment. Zu marched straight up to the lions and faced them, hands balled up into little fists on her hips. She took up a deep breath and commenced to roar and growl at the metal beasts.

No reaction. With a frustrated sigh, Zu trailed after Ellie and DJ.

The National Zoo proved to be a wonderland to the two girls. There were so many animals! Zu scampered hither and yon, laughing at the antics of the monkeys and the otters, gazing in amazement at the gigantic bison and elephants, staring in awe at the lofty giraffes, and "oohing" and "aahing" at the giant, cuddly pandas.

Ellie stopped short and pointed upwards, exclaiming in amazement. There, perched on a treebranch and looking down at them with a tiny, wise face was a brilliantly-colored, golden-orange monkey no larger than a squirrel.

"Am I seeing things?" Ellie wondered aloud. "What on earth would a monkey be doing out of its cage? He's a pretty little thing, too."

"Ah! A golden Lion Tamarin," replied DJ. "That's a really neat thing the keepers do here. During the summer months they release those monkeys so they can run about in the trees without being cooped up in cages. The monkeys even have colored dots on their rumps to tell them apart."

"Wouldn't they get into trouble, like getting lost or eaten?"

"Actually, monkeys are a lot smarter than cats or squirrels or any of the native animals living here," explained DJ. "They know where the food and shelter are. They just come outside to play. At night, they come right back into their cages for dinner and bedtime."

Ellie's favorites were the cats; she couldn't get enough of the mighty tigers, the magnificent lions or the graceful cheetahs. The lions especially reminded her of her own cat back home in Sweden. The big male lolled indolently in the shade of a spreading tree while the females basked in the sunlight or tended to their cubs; one of which seemed intent on hunting the tuft at the end of the male's tail. The little beast drew closer and closer, paws spread to the deadly ready, its golden amber eyes wide and unblinking, focused completely on its prey. Suddenly, with a snarl, it pounced!

The next movement was too fast to register. In one second the cub had sprung to the attack and then in the very next, it was sent tumbling in a brown-gold ball by a single flick from its father's tail. The big male's eyes remained at a profoundly bored half-mast. He yawned extravagantly, showing the reddish-pink interior of his mouth, along with four big, BIG fangs. The huge maw closed and a huge tongue took a swipe across a large, triangular brownish-pink nose as the lion resumed whatever meditation in which he had previously been engaged.

"MmmmmwwWWWAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHH!" leered Zu, gaping her own mouth as wide as she could at the lion and sticking out her tongue. The beast opened one eye and stared with utmost disinterest at the catgirl then stood, shook his mane and "FLOPPED" over on his other side, presenting his back to the onlookers.

Show over.

"What's your favorite animal?" inquired Ellie, wrapping her arms around DJ's elbow and gazing at him.

"Oh," DJ made a show of mulling the question before reaching an answer. "I think mine is Uncle Beazley."

"Uncle Beazley?" asked Ellie, puzzled. "Who is he?"

DJ led the girls through the throngs of people until they neared the Primate House.

"Is Uncle Beazley a gorilla?" Ellie asked, looking at the bronze gorilla statue at the front door of the building.

"Nope," replied DJ. "He's right there." He pointed at a fenced-in grassy hummock next to a concession stand. There, facing them in all of its prehistoric glory, was the life-sized rendering of a Triceratops.

*"Åh, dinosaurier!"* squealed Zu, crowding forward ebulliently.

"In a way, he's the first friend I made when I moved to DC," said DJ. "I read about him in a storybook when I was a kid, and I always wanted to meet him." He chuckled at the memory. "You should have seen my face when my wish was granted."

Ellie stepped back a few paces and took the dinosaur's picture.

"That's a sweet story," she replied, resting her head on DJ's shoulder and twining her arm around his waist. "I remember when I was a little girl I wanted to go to Copenhagen to meet the Little Mermaid. My story had a sadder ending than yours, though. When I saw her, somebody had stolen her head!"

It was evident that after their hours of tramping through the zoo, Zu's energy was definitely beginning to flag. She was stretched out on a shady parkbench, DJ's ball-cap perched aslant on her head. Her attention was absorbed by a beetle which had alit on one of her knees. The insect was valiantly trying to scale the steep mountain of her bent leg, but Zu kept pushing it back downhill with one finger. It made no difference, however; the beetle just kept on trying.

DJ was intently watching Ellie who was busily scribbling in a black book she had taken from her purse. He leaned over her shoulder and was quite surprised to see a likeness of his own profile.

"Wow!" he marvelled. "That's good! I wish I could draw like that."

Ellie laughed quietly, still sketching. "I saw that pirate-werewolf picture of yours the other day next to your computer. You're not lacking in talent yourself, you know. I just draw what I see."

"You're not looking at me correctly, then." commented DJ. "I'm not that handsome."

Ellie paused in her drawing and gazed at him for a long, long time.

"Like I said," she repeated softly, "I draw what I see." She smiled sweetly and continued drawing. DJ said nothing further, but one arm trailed about Ellie's shoulders. She nestled against him.

It was at this moment that she turned to face DJ, a serious expression on her face. The sketchbook closed with a muffled "fnap."

"DJ," she asked, softly but earnestly, "Could you do me a tremendous favor?"

"Sure, Ellie," replied DJ. "What would you like?"

"I have to . . . step out tonight for a few hours, to . . . meet some colleagues in town here who called me last evening. Would you mind watching over Zu until I returned?"

DJ shrugged. "Sure," he replied. "I'd be glad to."

Ellie beamed and she gave DJ a great hug. "Thank you so much!" she cried. "You're such a sweetheart."

"What time will you bring her over?"

"Well," replied Ellie, "My meeting is at six tonight, so how about I bring her by around five?"

"Wow," said DJ, looking at his wristwatch in concern, "That's cutting it a bit close." Suddenly he had an idea. "How about this," he suggested. "We go back to my place, and then you can just leave and go back to your hotel room and get ready. How's that?"

"You mean we leave right now?" Ellie was puzzled. "so soon?"

" It's three-thirty now, so we'd better leave so you can have time to get ready."

Ellie pouted. "Oh, I suppose so," she sighed. She got up and stretched, her curves tugging her overshirt away from the one-piece, much to the secret delight and consternation of the passers-by. Myriad pairs of eyes darted in her direction the males appreciative and admiring; the females resentful, envious and hostile. The male oglings were followed by angry nudges and harshly-whispered rebukes from their female companions. Ellie pretended not to notice.

"HEY!" shouted DJ angrily. "Why dont'cha get a picture? It'll last longer."

He stumped away in a huff, frowning at the ground. "Damned freaks," he grumbled.

Ellie shook her head. "Don't worry about it," she replied, softly laying a hand on his bicep.

"I don't like it either, but I'm used to it."

"Yeah," fumed DJ, "but there's a lot more to you than what's below your collarbones. They just don't care about what's between your ears." He sighed and looked off into the distance. "Personally, I think that's the sexiest part of a woman."

A warm glow of excitement suffused Ellie as she heard his words, but she strove to keep it hidden. "I know, but people are like that everywhere; even in Sweden." She held out her hands to him.

DJ rose and gave the half-conscious Zu a nudge, holding out his hand. Sleepily she looked at the hand and shook her head.

"You don't wanna hold my hand?" he asked.

In place of reply Zu stood up behind DJ on the parkbench, twined her arms around DJ's neck and her legs about his waist. She was very light, but DJ still stooped forward, grasping Zu's thighs and hoisting her up higher on his back for a more secure perch. Zu promptly nuzzled her face into the back of DJ's neck and went to sleep. In spite of himself DJ couldn't help but remark how soft and smooth Zu's skin was.

"You're not getting out of that one anytime soon," grinned Ellie.

"That's all right," chuckled DJ. "She's not heavy, she's . . ." suddenly he broke into a wide grin. "She's my daughter!"

They made their way back to the Metro station.

-----------------------------------------------------

Ellie primped and preened in the hotel-room mirror, making sure that everything was just right. She had chosen just the right dress for this occasion; a black, kneelength party-dress with just enough slit up the thigh to be daring but not overtly aggressive and just clingy enough to accentuate her full, lush curves without revealing too much. Two diamond earrings graced her ears and a diamond teardrop pendant gave the perfect amount of sparkle to her already-generous cleavage.

Ten minutes to five.

Zu was safely at DJ's for the evening, and they were probably eating, watching movies or playing at the moment. Ellie chuckled, totally confident that her Zu was in safe hands. Zu absolutely adored DJ . . . hell, Ellie was quite fond of him too. She blushed like a schoolgirl, thinking about DJ's charming earthiness. It was a very, very refreshing contrast and departure from the constraints and obligations of social and moneyed status. In Ellie's opinion, DJ had one of the greatest gifts one could have: freedom to be any way he wished, any*body* he wished; without worrying about what his peers would think. DJ was pure, unclouded by delusions of decorum, and was totally, completely, honestly . . . *himself*. Once Ellie had experienced that quality, as untainted by guile and false self-image as it was, she was loath to stop.  *In my heart of hearts,* she admitted to herself, *I think I truly L . . . no, not yet. I don't want to use the "L" word just yet, until I am absolutely certain of my feelings.*

She nodded, satisfied that she was making the right decision.

At that moment, a knock sounded at her suite door.

She exploded into a flurry of last-minute touch-ups to her lipstick, mascara and cologne before grabbing her black, sequined handbag from the nightstand and making sure she had her room-pass safely within. She took a deep breath and opened the door.

He was waiting for her there, a bouquet of roses in one hand. Ellie's eyes widened as she beheld Jay for the first time in nearly a decade. In some ways he hadn't changed a bit. He was tall and slender, just as she remembered him before, having grown from the awkward little schoolboy she had grown up with and befriended nearly sixteen years before. His wide, easygoing smile was the same, as were his strong, sure hands and his broad shoulders. His formerly rumpled haircut was gone, replaced by a neatly trimmed and combed style, and his gunmetal-colored formal suit was cut to impeccable perfection. The major difference was the sprinkling of silver at his temples and the hints of crows' feet at the corners of his eyes.

His smile widened as he proferred the bouquet.

"You look absolutely radiant, Ellie," he said, his comforting baritone untouched by the years.

Ellie was at a loss for words as she took the flowers from his hands and partook of their lush fragrance. "Thank you," was what she finally managed to get out. "It's so wonderful to see you again, Jay. I've missed you so much!" She hurried back into the hotel-room to get the blossoms some water before returning.

Jay turned towards the parking-lot, offering Ellie the crook of his arm.

"Shall we?" he smiled.

Ellie smiled back, slipped her hand into his arm and they headed towards Jay's Ferrari Testarossa. She couldn't help but whistle admiringly as Jay gallantly held open the door for her. He took her hand to help her in.

*"s'il vous plaît, Madamoiselle?"*

*"Madame, merci beaucoup,"* corrected Ellie, giving Jay a wink.  *"Vous êtes très galant, monsieur."*  She crossed her legs gracefully as she settled into the passenger's seat.

*"Bien sûr,"* replied Jay.  *"Seuls les meilleurs pour vous, ma chèri."*

They both paused, and then burst out into laughter as Jay seated himself behind the steering wheel and turned the ignition key. The sportscar's powerful engine purred like a panther as Jay moved it out of the parking lot and out onto the street. A nudge on the accelerator and they were gliding swiftly and almost noiselessly down the dusky avenue towards the Beltway.

"I said it before," said Jay, "but I have to say it again. You look absolutely radiant tonight. Just seeing you takes me all the way back."

"Thanks," replied Ellie, blushing. "You look fantastic too, I must say. When did you manage to get a Ferrari?"

"Oh, I've had this thing for two years now," replied Jay. "Those years I spent working with Dad back home really paid off." His eyes got a faraway gaze in them. "I brought some of my best handiwork here to the 'States and got some very valuable patents for them. Maybe someday I can reimburse you for all the things you got me."

"Oh, don't you dare," replied Ellie, swatting Jay lightly on the arm. "They were all gifts! I got them for you because I *wanted* to."

Jay shrugged. "Still," he said, "I'd just like to keep the Karma circulating."

"I tell you what," replied Ellie, shifting in her seat so she semi-faced Jay. "You just give me a wonderful time tonight, and we'll call it even. What do you say?"

"Deal."

The Ferrari hummed its way onto Southbound 270.

Jay had had the convertible top down, but soon closed it due to the wind. The airconditioner purred and the onboard CD player played soft music as they drove. The westering sun bathed all before them in a lambent aura of sunlight.

"So anyway," asked Jay, "what brings you to America?"

"Oh, mostly just a vacation. I've never been to the United States before, and I thought it would be an interesting place to see. I was able to get a pair of tickets, so that's why Zu is here as well."

"I bet she's having the time of her life by now."

"Oh, she is, she is," replied Ellie. "Yesterday we went to some of the museums and today we went to the National Zoo."

"Oh you did, eh?" Jay chuckled. "It's a shame you didn't bring her with you. We could have all gone out tonight."

Ellie was on the verge of telling Jay about DJ, but something caused her to refrain.

"That's all right," she said quietly. "Zu's really tired about now. I thought she could just stay behind and rest."

"That's okay. Maybe we can do something tomorrow! I could take Zu to a real, genuine Congressional session."

Ellie just smiled in reply and looked dreamily out the window, noting that they were traversing the same length of highway that she and DJ had gone over with Zu the morning before. To her disappointment they turned right, off the highway and onto Wisconsin Avenue. She had looked forward to seeing the Mormon Temple again.

"Where are we going?" she asked. "We've not been this way before."

"Of course we haven't, Silly!" laughed Jay. "I just picked you up twenty minutes ago."

He checked his wristwatch. "Eek! We have to hurry. We're running a little bit late."

"For what?"

"Oh, you'll see," sang Jay. "It's a surprise!" They continued on into town, pausing at the stoplights and cruising straight down the Avenue without turning. Now that they were off the freeway Jay lowered the convertible top of the Ferrari and the late-afternoon breeze played through Ellie's hair, bringing her the sweet-pungent aromas of freshly-cut grass, the heavy musk of the traffic, and intriguingly enough, the far-off, savory tang of grilled meat.

She imagined people in their backyards, grilling hamburgers and hotdogs, filling the air with the rich meaty tang of hickory smoke and partaking of the sacred ritual of the cookout. In spite of herself, she laughed quietly, imagining herself sampling that most American of traditions: The barbecue.

"What are you chuckling about?" Jay grinned at her. "A penny for your thoughts."

Ellie smiled back, fingers idly drumming on the car's windowsill. "I was just thinking right now," she said, "that here I am in America, and I have yet to try a barbecue."

Jay shook his head. "Oh, you won't have to worry about anything like *that* where we're going."

Ellie looked at him curiously, yet with just a hint of disappointment in her gaze.

"Tonight is going to be special!"

After another twenty minutes the car reached the Dupont Circle Roundabout and merged onto 16th Street.

"Don't worry," Jay assured her. "We're almost there." They continued onwards, making a right onto K street and after several more blocks and another roundabout, pulled up to the front gate of a very modern-looking, chrome-steel, glass-and-iron edifice. Three flags flew on the lawn before it: a blue flag with a circle of stars, the familiar stars-and-stripes of the United States, and finally a familiar blue flag sectored by an enormous golden cross. On the glass portico window in front read the legend:

**SVERIGES AMBASSAD**

"Here we are," announced Jay proudly. "My home away from home!"

The car slid up to the gate and Jay presented his credentials to the security patrolman seated in the gatehouse. The officer read Jay's pass and then looked questioningly at Ellie who produced her passport and her Doctor's certification ID.

"This is Dr. Ellie des Chaton," explained Jay. "She's with me as my guest for the evening. I've already made arrangements."

The guard consulted his clipboard and then saluted as he waved them through.

"We're having dinner at the Swedish Embassy?" inquired Ellie.

"Not exactly," replied Jay. "We're just here to meet our other companions for tonight. We're dining down the street."

He parked the car in the executive garage, helped Ellie out of her seat and escorted her through the main lobby of the building. Inside, near the front door, was a crowd of people already assembled; the men were all resplendent in suits or tuxedoes, the women radiant in evening gowns and jewelry. Ellie and Jay entered the throng of people as a distinguished, elderly gentleman approached them.

"Dr. Ellie des Chaton," said Jay, "I'd like to introduce Dr. Jans Arnorsson, the Swedish ambassador, who also has the misfortune of being my supervisor."

Dr. Arnorsson laughed as he took Ellie's hand.

"Charmed to meet you, Dr. des Chaton," he said, his voice a rich, fruity bass. "Jay told us that he would be bringing a guest, but he didn't say just how radiant you were."

Ellie was beside herself from the flattery. She could only nod her thanks and smile back. Everybody was so elegant! The people all swept by in dazzling kaleidoscopes of colors and shimmers as they made the rounds of introductions and reunions between associates. She shook hands with several Swedish notables and finally stopped short in awe as she saw an individual a bit apart from the rest.

"Jay!" she whispered. "Isn't that . . ."

Jay nodded. "That is indeed our very own Prime Minister. He's also here for dinner with us."

Ellie's mind was awhirl with emotion as Dr. Arnorsson stood by the front door.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he announced in a voice which filled the vast room, "our vehicles have arrived. If you would please follow me, we shall now proceed to our evening engagement."

The throng filed out towards a line of stretch limousines waiting by the curb, engines idling. Security guards opened the doors saluting, and the partiers all entered the vehicles which drew away as one from the building, out the gate and into the now-benighted city.

"I meant to ask," said Ellie, looking out her window, "we flew over that enormous river out there when we came into the airport. What is it?"

"That would be the Potomac," replied Dr. Arnorsson, who was seated with his own wife across from Jay and Ellie. "Across the river is Arlington, Virgina. Unfortunately, it's dark now, but if it weren't you could see the Pentagon and the Air-Force monument. If you look over there," he pointed at a brightly-lit acropolis across a small bay from them, "you will see the Lincoln Memorial."

Ellie looked closer and fancied she could see a gigantic statue seated within. The limos swept past and away before she could get a good view and she settled back again, disappointed. *DJ could have told me more about it*, she thought.

The limousines finally came to a halt in front of a large alabaster-colored mansion with an enormous fountain in the front of it. Security guards came up and opened the limo doors for the guests to depart and then escorted them up the steps to the front door.

"We've arrived," announced Dr. Arnorsson, chiefly for Ellie and Jay's benefit. "This is Seventeen Hundred, Pennsylvania Avenue. Welcome to the White House."

------------------------------------------------------------

The north bank of the Potomac River was dark down near the waterline. The lights of the city danced and gyrated with the ripples made by the wind, by passing water-traffic or waterfowl startled into spastic, nocturnal flight. Frogs grumbled and croaked in the cat-tails and rushes growing on the muddy shore and the sighing of the wind through the thin stems of the reeds provided a dolorous undertone to the night, punctuated by the occasional "splash" of a jumping fish.

A single shaft of brilliant light played up and down the edge of the water, coming from a single point , approximately one meter above the ground. The source of the illumination proved to be a large, black flashlight held in a large, chocolate-hued hand with knuckles that stood out like the knots of a treebranch festooned with rings and gaudy jewelry. The tall, angular black man's dreadlocks swayed in the light evening breeze and his restless eyes combed over every inch of the space before him.

Behind and to the right his companion walked in shadow, a shorter, stockier individual with similar dreadlocks now kept in check by rubberbands.

The two men walked along in silence, pausing for mere seconds to look at something on a twig, or an object floating in the water. Suddenly, the shorter man gave a cry and pointed towards a spot, about an arm's length from shore, half-hidden by reeds. The lightbeam slashed over and illuminated the location.

There, humping up out of the water approximately 11 centimeters, was the smooth dome of a human skull. The beam froze on the object while the two searchers exchanged thoughts and opinions in low tones.

The lightbeam "clicked" off and the two men went back the way they had come.

------------------------------------------------------------

DJ settled back into his easy chair and clicked on the remote to the TV. Zu had insisted (in her own way) on setting and clearing the table for dinner and he had willingly obliged her, even though they were having pizza (again). DJ somehow just found it comforting to have companionship nearby, for once. Besides, it was fun watching how Zu bustled about, moving plates, cleaning dishes and stacking them up for placement back in the cupboard. He felt his affection for the catgirl growing with every minute.

"It's about time for the news," he said to nobody in particular, clicking the buttons to change the channel.

"--ming to you live," announced the network anchorperson, "we have the breaking story of the State dinner at the White House for the visiting Swedish officials, hosted by the President and the First Lady. Here we see the President shaking hands with the Swedish Prime Minister, and now the President is greeting Swedish Ambassador Jans Arnorsson. Next comes the Ambassador's senior Consulate aide and his wife . . ."

DJ went rigid. It was Ellie. She was on the television this very second, offering her hand to the President, her other arm around that of a tall, slender, handsome catman with black hair just going to silver at the temples. DJ tried with all his strength to get his finger to move to the "off" button but somehow he had lost all feeling in his extremities. All of the angsts, worries and unease he had tried to dispel now burst their bonds and roared, screamed and bellowed back up from his subconscious with him now utterly powerless to defend himself. His soul was laid bare, and he had no recourse but to wait for the end. It came with the finality of an ice-dagger plunged through his heart.

"Daddy!" chirped Zu, skipping in from the kitchen, a dishtowel in her hands. *"Nu kan vi . . ."* She paused when she saw the anguished look on DJ's face. Puzzled, she looked at the TV screen.

"Ah, Ellie! Jay!" Zu cried merrily, pointing. "*Där är El* . . . Uh, Daddy?" She looked back at DJ, puzzlement growing to concern. DJ had shown absolutely no reaction to her presence, his horrified eyes still glued to the screen.

She crept closer to DJ, her face growing dark with worry. Reaching out, she carefully laid a hand on his arm.

"Daddy?" she repeated, giving him a gentle shake.

DJ was inert.

Zu looked around for something, anything, to break the spell DJ was under. Finally she took a chance and removed the remote from DJ's unresisting fingers. With a click, the television winked out.

"Daddy!" Zu was beginning to get frightened.

From one of the other apartments came the doleful refrain of a song by James Blunt:

*You're beautiful. You're beautiful.*

*You're beautiful, it's true.*

*There must be an angel with a smile on her face,*

*When she thought up that I should be with you.*

*But it's time to face the truth,*

*I will never be with you.*

DJ pitched forward and buried his face in his hands.

-----------------------------------------------

The fire crackled quietly in the fireplace, throwing golden flickers which danced against the walls and ceiling of the darkened room, sparkled across the windows and lit up the faces of the two figures reclined on the carpet in front of it.

The State Dinner had been a rousing success, despite the long-winded, interminable speechmaking by the honored guests and the hosts of the evening, and afterward the party had gone on an after-hours tour of many of the National monuments, including the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial and the Jefferson Memorial. Ellie couldn't help but be awed by the view from atop the ivory spire, and she felt a moment of smugness when she pictured the look on DJ's face had he been present.

Afterward, a little after midnight, the party wound down and at last she and Jay had returned to his eighth-floor apartment overlooking the Potomac River. Far away, on the opposite shore, the lights of Arlington, Virginia twinkled in the blackness of the horizon while the air-traffic over the airport cast tiny, gossamer streamers of light into the night air.

Ellie slowly spun her glass of champagne as she stared into the flames, the deep red liquid swirling around and around, the bubbles within catching the light like tiny stars. She had removed her high-heels and swished her feet in the deep pile of the carpet. She leaned against Jay who was seated next to her, his coat and tie removed and his shirt cuffs unbuttoned. He had his arms about his knees and was staring idly into the fire, his own champagne glass dangling unheeded from his fingers.

A log cracked, sending a shower of sparks spattering harmlessly against the glass fender.

"So tell me," Ellie asked, sipping from her glass again. "How exactly does the charity you're proposing work, again?"

Jay drank (a bit sloppily) from his own glass and began to speak.

"Well, you see," he said, rubbing the back of his neck, "it's gonna be called 'Arm's Reach,' and it's meant to provide reconstruction/prosthetic services for patients in the third world who are unable to pay, or unable to pay *much.*  They can get the reconstructive surgery or prosthetic outfittings either free or at a substantial discount. I've decided to dedicate the program and all the proceeds to the memory of my Dad." His eyes misted over at the memory.

Ellie nodded. "I'm sure he's very , very proud of you," she said softly, looking admiringly into his eyes and laying a hand on his bicep. "You've come a long way over the years." Suddenly she laughed. "Listen to me, going on and on like a schoolgirl crush! I sound just like I did when we were back in Sweden." She took another sip from her glass.

"I don't have any problems with that. You're just being your usual, beautiful self." He set his champagne glass down and stared at Ellie for a long, long time. You know," he said, his voice a mellow purr, "I've never met anybody even remotely like you. I've never doubted that's why I fell in love with you . . . before . . ." He trailed off as Ellie leaned further towards him. Their lips met.

Without a word, they were entwined in each other's arms, writhing on the carpet and sending the dregs of their champagne across the mirrored parquet of the living-room floor.

Jay panted as he sought out Ellie's neck and Ellie moaned as she drew her head backwards, drowning in the feel of Jay's lips on her skin once more.

It was fierce, passionate and primal. Jay's hands squeezed Ellie's forearms, her biceps, her shoulders and clavicles, and moved downwards to knead her breasts through her dress.

Ellie clawed at his back, striving to bring him ever closer to her while his hands frantically sought out the zipper at her back.

The zipper purred downwards between Jay's fingers and he thirstily buried his face in between Ellie's exposed breasts. He fell upon her body with all the wild, fierce tenderness he could muster, working his hands over her bountiful breasts, sucking and teasing her nipples until her eyes rolled back in her head and she came close to swooning.

Jay sprang to his feet and with a single motion swept Ellie into his arms and turned to the bedroom. She kicked, lightly tapped his chest with her fists and giggled as they entered the darkness within and closed the door.

Ellie bounced upon the mattress where Jay tossed her, her eyes flaming like the fire outside in the hearth as she peeled her dress away from her own form.

Jay returned her stare as he roughly tore off his shirt, his trousers and finally his underwear.

Ellie was clad only in the briefest of panties as Jay reclined upon the bed next to her, caressing her breasts and moving one hand and a leg between her thighs.

She was in the last throes of passion and ready to give in, when the last vestiges of propriety engaged and she placed a hand upon Jay's chest, pushing him up.

"Hold on just a second," she panted, "while I catch my breath. After all, there's no hurry."

"It's been eight years," Jay insisted.

"Indeed it has," Ellie pointed out levelly. "Just a little while longer won't matter, will it?" She sinuously rose from the bed and turned to face him. Slowly, slowly she knelt and spread his legs, revealing his raging erection. She smiled gently and pressed her soft, round breasts around his manhood and began to pump.

Jay's eyes rolled back in his head and he reclined backwards on his elbows as Ellie administered her treatment upon him. The satin smoothness of her breasts caressed his shaft as they worked it up and down within their cleavage. Ellie extended her tongue and lightly flicked at the drop of pre-cum which formed at the tip of his penis-head. Jay began to sigh lustily as the tempo of Ellie's titfucking increased.

As her breasts squeezed, glided against and sensuously caressed Jay's rod, Ellie began to run her fingertips over her own nipples, setting them to tingling warmly with her own sexual exertions. A hot sigh escaped her lips which rose into a moan as Jay surreptitiously shifted one leg and moved a foot in between Ellie's thighs. This time she didn't resist. A warm wetness soaked through her panties as she began moving her crotch up and down Jay's foot and ankle in time to the thrusts against her breasts.

Ellie felt like she was in a maelstrom of lust, with her pussy getting hotter and yet hotter, closer and yet closer to meltdown while her breasts worked frantically against Jay's overheating rod. He was moaning fitfully and grabbing hold of the bedsheets as his head tossed from side to side, his eyes clenched shut.

At last he began to shudder, and Ellie quickly put her lips to the head of his penis as she worked her tits rapidly towards the end.

Jay's body jerked, his back arched and he came, his semen spurting into Ellie's mouth as she gave out her own muffled cries from the sensations emanating from her spasming, creaming pussy.

With a final shudder and a swallow it was all over.

Utterly spent, Ellie crawled weakly into bed and sighed wearily as she felt Jay's arms twining around her waist. In mere moments came quiet snores from behind her.

She stared into the blackness of the bedroom, her eyes dark with tears.

*I'm so, so sorry, DJ,* she thought. *I'm so sorry. Please forgive me.*

-----------------------------------------

DJ lay in the darkness of his bedroom, too weary to sleep, too grief-stricken to cry. He stared blindly and numbly into space.

*Why the fuck did I get so upset over it?*  He demanded of himself. *I've only known her and Zu for a few days. Goddamn it, DJ! Brace up! It only makes sense that someone like Ellie would have a boyfriend, or . . .* he could barely stand to face the next words, . . . *a husband. Why would she want some nobody like me? I wouldn't want a nobody like me.* He balled up a fist under the blankets.  *CUT THAT SHIT OUT!* He screamed at himself in a mental rage.  *I said brace the fuck up, and I mean NOW! Get a fucking hold of yourself!*

It didn't work. His heart felt like lead and the dark night felt darker, colder and lonelier than it had in a long time. The saddest part was that he was long used to it. Christine, Pamela, and now Ellie. It was just one ugly part of a boring, ugly, lonely life. He buried his face into his blankets and tried to will sleep to come.

"Daddy?" a tiny voice asked.

Gloomily, DJ looked towards the door. The lights were all off but even in the dimness coming in from the living-room patio door he could make out a slender figure standing there facing him.

"Daddy OK?" asked Zu, tenderness and compassion in her voice. Her shape disappeared into the blackness of the bedroom as the door closed, but DJ could make out the soft sounds of her small feet padding towards the bed. Presently he felt her seating herself next to him and then her hand resting on his exposed arm.

"No," DJ murmured, too drained to raise a false front of confidence and instead electing to tell the truth. "Daddy not OK."

He felt her lay down next to him and cuddle her nubile body next to his. She twined her arm over his left flank, rested her hand gently upon his chest and put her chin on his shoulder.

He felt her warm, sweet breath against his neck and her soft skin against his arm. It felt so good to have her body pressed against him. It felt almost like . . .

On impulse he reached behind himself. His hand felt a soft, firm, shapely little breast and the tender nubbin of one nipple before trailing down the slender curve of a waist to a smooth-skinned, bare hip. Her slim tail batted softly against his hand. What was she doing? Although DJ's brain was a whirl of confusion, his instincts were very straightforward. Against his own will, he felt an increasing hardness between his thighs. He had to act quickly before things got out of hand.

"What are you doing, Zu?" he demanded, rolling over and looking at her in dismay.

Zu's command of English was increasing exponentially, but it was still woefully inadequate for conversation. Nevertheless, she tried her utmost to be understood.

"You are . . . a sack?"

DJ stared blankly at her, completely blindsided by the incongruity of the question.

"What did you say?" he wanted to know, totally clueless as to what Zu was driving at.

Zu made an impatient noise of frustration, and then tried again.

"You are a sack? A sack?"

"Am I a *SACK?"* DJ had to scratch his own head in bafflement.

"A sack." She mimed weeping. *"gråta?"*

DJ thought about it some more before coming up with an idea. "You mean, 'Am I *sad*?'"

"Yes!" cried Zu, relieved to finally get the correct word. "Sad. You are sad?"

"Yes," DJ sighed, settling heavily back onto the mattress and looking up blankly at the ceiling. "Sad." He rested his left arm over his eyes. "Daddy is very sad."

"Daddy, I not . . . not . . . a surgeon."

"You're not a . . . what?"

"I not a surgeon." She made a circle with one index finger and thumb and pumped her other finger through the hole. "See? Not a surgeon."

"You're not a *virgin?"* DJ had to laugh in spite of himself. *"*Zu, that is NONE of my business! Why would it matter if you were a virgin or not?"

Zu slowly drew one fingertip down DJ's arm. "I happy you again."

She didn't say anything further, but her slender hand began to slowly move up and down his chest while she nuzzled against his neck. DJ turned his head towards her and felt her soft breath against his face. She brushed her lips against his as her hand moved further down over his chest, then to his stomach and then his waist. With a single slide she was inside his briefs, grasping his erect rod. Slowly, carefully, she began to tug.

"No, Zu," he protested weakly, feeling his resistance draining away. "We can't! What about your boyfriend, Sixten?"

"Is OK," replied Zu consolingly. "You sad, I happy you." She continued masturbating DJ under the blankets.

DJ was in agony. On one side he fiercely rejected the idea of Zu debasing herself just for him, for any reason. On the other, oh God-DAMMIT, that felt good. His resolve was sluicing away like water in a sieve until . . . until . . .

"NO!" he bellowed, savagely grabbing Zu by the shoulders and thrusting her away from him, holding her in an iron-grip an arm's length away. "Dammit, Zu, cut it OUT!" He gave her one fierce shake, glaring at her, his eyes aglow, furious. "STOP IT!!"

Zu's head had whipped sharply back from the shaking, and now she cringed away from DJ as much as his hold on her would allow. Her eyes were wide with fear, dismay and confusion. Her lips trembled as she raised her hands to her face, unable to blink.

"I . . . I happy you," she quavered, her eyes brimming with tears. One escaped and ran down her cheek as she began to shake with silent sobs.

Her countenance was so pathetic and her voice so tremulous that DJ's ire and indignation vanished like smoke. His eyes softened and he drew her to him, holding her close and stroking her hair.

"Oh, Baby," he murmured, his voice thick with remorse. "I'm so sorry. I won't ever do anything to hurt you. But," he gained a stern but gentle tone. "I can't let you do that for me, even if you're trying to cheer me up. I'd never let you do that to yourself. Ever. Okay?" He released her and gently brushed her bangs from her forehead.

"Okay," replied Zu dejectedly.

"Now then," DJ said, lying back down and tucking Zu in next to him, "Let's get some sleep." He rested his head on the pillow, closed his eyes and protectively draped one arm around Zu's waist.

After several long minutes, DJ's breathing became deeper, slower and more regular.

Zu opened her eyes and looked over at DJ's somnolent face. Moving as quietly as she could, she pushed his arm off her.

DJ's arm dropped heavily to the mattress and he rolled over onto his back, murmuring and muttering incoherently before dropping back into deep slumber.

Carefully, Zu reached down and felt DJ's groin. Sure enough, he was still hard.

Without making a sound, Zu burrowed her way beneath the blankets until she felt she was near her goal. Slowly, she grasped the elastic of DJ's underwear and pulled it down, revealing his throbbing, erect shaft.

She had had enough practice with Sixten to know just what to do in a situation like this. She carefully encircled the girth of DJ's penis with her thumb and forefinger and began to pump slowly at first and then a little harder.

DJ's breathing faltered a bit and he shifted his weight before dropping back to sleep again. Zu continued her errand of mercy. She continued massaging DJ's erection with one hand and began caressing his balls with the other. DJ began to murmur and writhe slowly in the darkness.

Deciding to up the volume, Zu pressed her lips against his glans, feeling the silky warmth of the precum which had begun to gather there. Slowly, carefully, she parted her lips, slid his penis into her mouth and began to bob her head in sync with her hand. Her own pussy was growing wet, but this wasn't about her. Her Daddy needed to be consoled, and she would do it the best way she knew how.

DJ's murmuring raised in volume to become quiet moans and he began to move his hips in time to Zu's actions.

Zu continued, her saliva making DJ's penis slick and slippery, which actually facilitated her actions. She released his shaft from her mouth so she could come up for air, exhaling as quietly as she could before returning to the task at hand. She could feel his testicles pulsing beneath her hand and sensed that her work would soon be over.

With a spasm and a cry, DJ finally ejaculated. Zu expertly caught all of his cum before it spattered on the blankets. A few pearly rivulets trailed down his shaft onto her fingers, but that couldn't be helped. She licked her fingers clean before replacing his underwear and coming back up to the surface.

"Are you happy now?" DJ curtly wanted to know. "I thought I told you not to do that."

Zu froze.

DJ mulled the situation over and then chuckled quietly, chucking her under the chin. "It's okay, Zu. I know you just wanted to help. Thank you very much. I'm very happy now." He smiled at her and in spite of herself, Zu smiled back.

"But remember, if you pull a stunt like that, I'll kill ya! Now, for the last time, let's get some *sleep!!"* He tapped her nose to drive his point home.

This time Zu needed no additional prompting. She spooned up against DJ and allowed him to drape his arm over her waist again.

Within a few moments, they were both deep in slumber.

-------------------------------------------------

A far-off, rolling boom wakened DJ from a deep, dreamless sleep. He blinked blearily, trying to get his bearings and finally focused on a slender, bare shoulder and the back of a small head topped with a luxurious tress of dark brown hair and two pointed little cat-ears. The shoulder rose and fell slowly with each breath and one of the ears twitched once, twice, and was still.

DJ looked up at the window and listened to the rustling, rattling patter of rain. It was a comforting sound usually, but now it boded of a gray, bleak morning trapped indoors.

The clock on the dresser blinked 8:30am.

The memories of the previous night flooded back and he roughly tore the blankets away from himself.

His briefs were still in place.

Breathing a deep sigh of relief, he eased himself off the other side of the bed in order not to disturb his peacefully-sleeping bedmate.

Zu sighed and rolled over onto her back, her perfect breasts slowly rising and falling with each breath she took as DJ raised the blankets and covered her up to her chin. Shrugging a bathrobe over his shoulders, he left the bedroom and shuffled down the hallway and through the living-room.

The front door was devoid of a note, as was the mailbox.  *And why should I expect her to be back promptly?* DJ thought heavily. *She's on vacation, and besides, she's a grownup. Zu is fine, and that's all that matters.* The rain echoed more loudly down the hallway, and the booming of the thunder reverberated off the doors of the other units. *Too bad it's raining,* he observed to himself.  *It would have been a fantastic day to go to the Museum of National History.* He had an inspiration and snapped his fingers.

Why *couldn't* they go? After all, the Museum was indoors, it was free, and the crowds would be kept away because of the bad weather. It would be tricky keeping dry while outside, but he was certain Zu would love it. Besides, he had a rainponcho, and Zu could use his spare umbrella.

A small noise behind him caught his attention. Zu was standing there, sleepily rubbing her eyes and holding the bedroom door ajar.

"Mmhh . . . Daddy?" she yawned, holding out her arms to him. *"Jag är hungrig."*

DJ nodded. "So'm I." Zu padded out into the living room and draped herself on the sofa. She made quite a fetching display, lying stretched out full-length with nothing on her body save air, but DJ immediately placed the bundle of her clothes in her arms and hustled her back into the bedroom.

"I'll think of something for us to eat," he told her, "but now, you need to get back in there and get dressed!"

Grudgingly, the catgirl turned and went back in, closing the door as she went.

DJ took this opportunity to make a comprehensive inventory of all the breakfast-oriented foodstuffs in his kitchen.

After a thorough search of the refrigerator, drawers and cupboards, he came up with the following:

One box of raisins.

One set of salt and pepper.

One box of baking-soda.

Two nearly-full bottles, one containing vinegar and the other cooking-oil.

One plastic container with something which might have been cheese, or was it maybe tuna? Perhaps it was hamburger casserole, or maybe leftover spackling paste. At any rate, it was completely petrified and unusable.

Zu padded back in, now clad in her usual green bellyshirt, yellow dress and stockings. She gasped when she saw DJ, and immediately put her hands on her hips, pouting indignantly.

"What's up with you, Zu?" frowned DJ in puzzlement. Zu marched straight up to him and perfunctorily tugged on his bathrobe sleeve, glaring at him accusingly, and brusquely made a questioning gesture.

"I'm trying to figure out breakfast," explained DJ. "That's why I'm not dressed yet."

Zu crossed her arms over her chest and stared skeptically at him, not buying it. At length she slashed an arm backwards behind herself and pointed to the bedroom.

"What; now?" DJ wanted to know, before Zu sprang forward and began pushing him towards the bedroom door. Finally he relented.

"Okay, okay," he said. "I'll get dressed myself, and then we can go get something to eat."

He changed his underwear (not noticing the door had opened a sliver and one bright green eye was looking through the gap) and then shrugged on a yellow teeshirt, brown-plaid workshirt over that, and his usual khaki cargo-shorts. He was about to opt for sandals but remembered it was raining. With a sigh, on went the socks and shoes. Finally he took a pen and scrap of paper from the top drawer of his dresser and scrawled a brief note:

**"Went sightseeing, back later. Will call U. DJ & Z."**

Zu was waiting for him, seated primly and (DJ felt, a little too) innocently at one end of the sofa, hands folded on her lap, a broad, radiant smile on her face.

"All right, kiddo," DJ wanted to know, "What have you been up to?" In reply, Zu made the widest, most innocent, most "Who, *me*?" face she could and shook her head. Rather than pursue the issue, DJ fetched his rainponcho and umbrella, and taped the note to the outside of the door. Zu hopped up from the sofa and followed him out the front door and into the rainy morning outside.

With a "snap" she unfurled her umbrella as DJ donned his rainponcho and began the slog out to the car. Despite the rain the weather was warm and perhaps a trifle muggy.

With a squeal of delight, Zu darted forward and took a flying leap into the air.

>>KERSPLAASH!!!<< A spray of water surged into the air as Zu attacked another unsuspecting rainpuddle, then another and another, the water splashing and sloshing futilely about the soles of her galoshes.

DJ had reached the car and shaken the rainwater off his poncho the best he could before opening the door and settling in behind the steering wheel. A honk of the horn and a beckoning gesture brought Zu scampering up and getting settled in the passen-ger's side. She barked out a sharp cry of pain as the umbrella fluttered shut; she had pinched her finger on the latch. The umbrella was discarded into the back seat as Zu wisely clicked her seatbelt.

"I just realized something," remarked DJ. "This is the first time you've ever sat in the front seat with me." Zu giggled in reply. "Usually the front seat is reserved for . . ." Suddenly, DJ felt very uncomfortable. Moodily he fell silent and started chewing his lower lip, trying to force the unwelcome pain from his mind.

Zu said nothing, but a slender hand reached over and rested on DJ's arm. Zu knew that DJ was melancholy and she knew why, even though she wasn't perfectly able to relate her mind. Ellie was her dear, dear friend, and thus Zu wasn't convinced that Ellie would do that to the man who had so befriended them both in this new country.

The car maneuvered out of the parking lot and trundled down the street, headed for the nearest restaurant.

----------------------------------------

Ellie's face was stone.

"I'm sorry, DJ," she said coldy, "but we just can't continue. I know we had some good times, but you need to get a grip and understand that I was just 'slumming.' You know what that is, don't you? I mean after all, I'm 'up-here,' and you're . . . well, 'down-there.' We can't, we--can't, uh . . . we . . ." Frustrated, she placed a hand over her eyes and shook her head to clear her thoughts. It just felt so wrong.

Her face took on a bright, cheerful expression.

"Hi, DJ!" she chirped. "Man, it's great to see you today! Look, Baby, we need to . . ."

She closed her eyes, looked up and tried again, this time with deep remorse.

"Please understand, DJ. I care deeply about you, and I know that you care about me, but we . . . damn it." She cleared her throat.

(Ahem) "I'm sorry, DJ. I'm--I'm very sorry, DJ. Please understand, DJ; we need to . . . Look, um; DJ, it's . . .FUCK!"

A fist thumped against the marble vanity top as Ellie stared miserably at her own reflection in the mirror. Why couldn't she do it? She had been reunited with Jay after years and years, and was even on the verge of recapturing the heady days of her fondest memories. It was a wish for which she had secretly yearned for a long, long time, and now, at long last, it was within her grasp. All she had to do was this one act; this one last, final act.

But why the FUCK couldn't she bring herself to do it? All she wanted to do now was run headlong out of here, away from Jay, away from this apartment, away from everything and just be alone to collect herself. Afterwards, she wanted to immerse herself in DJ's arms and forget everything else but him.

But that would mean Jay would . . .

On one side was the well-known, familiar world of wealth, entitlement and social status. On the other was the new, refreshing territory of individuality and dignity free of the constraints of social rank. One side could have almost anything it wanted simply by reaching for it, while the other had to make everything it needed on its own. She remembered the trip to the National Mall, and at one point watching DJ beneath the oak tree as he studied his own hands.

"What are you looking at?" she had wanted to know.

DJ had explained that he often did that; he looked at all of the roughness on his knuckles, the gnarled, calloused spots at the bases of his fingers. It all came from hard, honest work.

"You don't get callouses like these from idleness," he pointed out. "If you want to be honest, I think these callouses are my proudest achievement. I get more satisfaction and pride from what I make myself than from what I can just buy from the store."

Ellie had made dinner for them all that night, and she was absolutely astounded to realize DJ was right. The humble food she had crafted herself was infinitely better than the finest cuisine she had ever been served, and the companionship infinitely more enjoyable. And now it was gone forever.

UNLESS . . .

Ellie's eyes misted over as she studied her reflection. Her blonde hair was rumpled and her makeup smudged, and she was nude, save for her panties and one of Jay's dress-shirts covering her breasts. She could still taste the savor of Jay's lips, feel the strength of his arms, the tingling skills of his fingers, but somehow now, after all these years, it felt so . . .

. . . Strange.

It felt like she once had when she was twelve. She had come across a lavender jumper she remembered as being her absolute favorite when she had been eight. Eagerly she had donned the suit only to find that it didn't fit right anymore. In fact, it had been quite uncomfortable. Tearfully she had folded it up and placed it in her keepsake drawer. She had that jumper to this very day, but never again did she wear it, or would even attempt to, had it even been possible. She still loved it very much, but she had outgrown it and nothing could change that. It was then that she realized that she and Jay had been apart for too long to simply pick up where they had left off eight years before. Her decision had been made.

Ellie felt two strong, bare arms twine about her shoulders and two lips graze her neck.

"A penny for your thoughts," Jay murmured into her ear.

Ellie sank back against Jay's chest, savoring his scent and luxuriating in the strength of his arms . . . one last time. At last she turned and gently pushed away, turning to face him.

"Jay," she said quietly, looking at him with infinite tender sadness in her eyes, the very look she had been practicing for DJ; "I love you. Please understand that I love you more than you can imagine, but . . . just not in *that* particular way any more. Last night was wonderful, and I wouldn't change a thing, but we *both* have to see things the way they are."

She reached forward and grasped his hands in hers.

"I love you more than you can possibly ever know," she said, "and that will never, ever change. Please understand that. My love for you has changed over the years, but it has never diminished, and it never will. That I promise."

Jay's face darkened and he slowly lowered his arms. He sighed heavily as his gaze fell for a moment to his own slippered feet and then rose again to Ellie's eyes.

"I think I know what you're gonna say," he replied. "It's just really, really hard to face." He walked to the edge of the bathtub and settled down upon it. "I had a long, long think about it . . . about *us* . . . over the past couple days." He shook his head. "I just found out that you were in town, and I got so overwhelmed with memories that I acted impulsively. I kept thinking you were still the woman I had to part with eight years ago, and nothing would have changed. I guess I've come to the same conclusion you have, but it wasn't what I wanted or expected."

Ellie nodded. "Me either. However, it very well may be what we both *need.*  You have to admit we've both changed, Jay," she admitted. "We've aged. We're both older, more experienced, wiser. To deny all that and just go back to the way things were between us eight years ago wouldn't be fair to either of us. You have your career and your life here in Washington and more importantly, your father's legacy to look after*.*  I have my practice, my patients and my clinic back home in Granköping . I couldn't just leave them behind, any more than you could leave *Arm's Reach*." She leaned forward and softly grasped Jay's face in her hands so she could see his eyes.

Jay shook his head and gently pulled her hands away.

"You're right," he said. "You're right. I just want you to know I didn't mean you any harm. I never did."

"I know you didn't!" cried Ellie, embracing Jay and holding him close. "And I love you for the way you've treated me." She drew back, still holding him now at arms' length. "The people we were back then will always be together, forever. It's just," her hands dropped away, "The people we are *now,* can't be."

"Could I at least treat you to breakfast, and . . ." his adult facade parted and for a split-second he turned back into the beloved, hopeful little boy of her youth, "And give you a ride home?"

Ellie smiled gently as she dressed. "Sure," she said. "I'd like that. However," she checked her wristwatch, "We'd probably have to make it lunch at this point."

Jay left the bathroom as Ellie finished dressing.

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This Metro trip into Washington was radically different than the previous excursions. Zu no longer squirmed excitedly in her seat or chattered merrily to herself in anticipation of the day to come. Somehow the dreary gray outside the train-car's window had also penetrated her mind and her demeanor. She sat quietly, looking out the window at the streaks of rainwater on the glass which were now horizontal due to the speed of the train. Her right hand maintained a steadfast grip on DJ's left and her tail slowly batted against his thigh.

DJ had snagged an "Express" newspaper and was leafing through it, scanning the headlines and mouthing the words he read.

They debarked in Metro Center for the switch to the blue line, and again ascended the escalator to the National Mall.

The rain did little to diminish the overpowering size of the Capitol Dome; in fact, against the slaty, rainy sky the mighty orb resembled nothing so much as a gigantic iceberg, lashed by the frigid winds of the Arctic.

Zu had unfurled her umbrella again and DJ donned the hood to his rainponcho as they hurried acrossed the wet, slick gravel to the entrance to the Museum of National History.

Zu's distraction evaporated when she beheld the main rotunda of the Museum. A radiant smile crept back across her lips as a rampaging bull African elephant confronted them with a trumpeting roar, its mighty trunk and ears raised in defiance and its huge tusks bristling in challenge. Zu ducked behind DJ with an excited shriek before she realized that the colossal beast was immobile and its bellows emanated from a speaker hidden within the grass at its feet.

In addition to the recorded elephant sounds coming from the diorama the air was full of the soughing and rolling of the people present. Instead of the legions of sightseers which usually filled the museum, the visitors today were relegated mostly to singles, pairs and small groups.

*"Dinosaurier!"* squealed Zu. *"Kan vi se fler dinosaurier idag?"* She tugged eagerly on DJ's sleeve, leading him on*. "Var finns de?"*

"You're still Jonesing on Uncle Beazley, aren't you?" DJ guessed, managing a chuckle. He let her lead the way.

They strolled leisurely through the vast ramparts of the museum, gasping in admiration at the life-sized whale suspended from the ceiling of the Oceans Hall.

A twenty-foot-long, coffinlike box directly beneath caught their notice. Trundling over, DJ took a look within and spied the coiled-up tentacles and torpedolike body of a giant *Architeuthis* squid. He motioned to Zu.

Zu's eyes widened in wonder at the beast suspended inside. "Oooh," she whispered*. "Tentakler!"* She giggled and tapped on the glass. Nothing.

"Look over here, Zu!" DJ pointed enthusiastically at a strange-looking, dark-brown-and-white bird and carefully sounding out the Latin name. "This bird used to live in Sweden! *Pin-guin-us im-pennis*." He had researched that very specimen earlier online*. "Det är en stor alkor!"* He beamed at her, proud of his first complete sentence in Swedish.

Zu managed to giggle at him and she shook her head.

"It isn't?"

Zu smiled. "*Det är en Garfågel,"* she corrected, giving his arm a squeeze and winking up at him.

"Okay, Miss Know-it-all," DJ replied, grinning back. Suddenly, his grin turned evil as he grabbed Zu around the waist, wrestled with her in his arms and gave her a light noogie on top of her head, right between her ears.

Zu shrieked and laughed, batting lightly at him as she struggled free. A few of the more anal-rententive museum-goers looked at them with disdainful raised eyebrows, but neither DJ nor Zu cared.

*"Du är stygg, Daddy,"* Zu remonstrated playfully.

"Oh yeah?" countered DJ. "Do something about it!"

The next stop, at last, was the Dinosaur hall. Two stony prehistoric titans arched over the entryway; *Tyrannosaurus rex* faced its perennial foe, *Triceratops,* both frozen forever in fossilized combat. The colossal monster *Diplodocus* loomed over all present while the fearsome *Allosaurus* stalked beside the bristling, aggressive-looking Stegosaurus.

Zu was back to her enthusuastic old self, gazing raptly at the antediluvian beasts while making roaring and growling noises at them and slashing at them with her clawed fingers.

She stared in amazement at the spreading antlers of the Ice-Age *Megaloceros* elk and the brutish features of the Neanderthal men.

DJ tried to get in on the game, baring his teeth and widening his mouth to the utmost at the stuffed hippopotamus in the Mammals Hall; a stunt which absolutely delighted Zu. She giggled, clapped her hands and capered all around him.

"Do you want to see an Imax film?" asked DJ. Zu cocked her head in puzzlement as DJ led her to the theater, paid the admission and then walked through the turnstile. Presently they found themselves in a lofty movie theater facing a several-stories-tall movie screen. They seated themselves and donned their special glasses as the movie started.

It was a 3-D feature about the dinosaurs which once inhabited Canada. Zu gaped in astonishment as the vast herds of horned beasts thundered towards her, seemingly hell-bent on running her over. She squeaked in alarm and ducked her head into DJ's elbow. When nothing happened she peeked out again, only to see a T-rex's gaping, roaring, slavering maw relentlessly bearing down on her. With another cry of fear she scurried for cover.

Nothing happened.

DJ chuckled at her reaction. "Never seen a 3D movie before?" he asked. "No big deal. I remember the first one I saw. I thought a pterodactyl would poke my eyes out!"

Zu giggled nervously and resumed watching the movie, but her grip on DJ's hand was very tight indeed.

At last the show ended, and it was not without an air of relief that Zu dropped her 3d-viewing glasses back into the bin.

"Well," said DJ, checking his wristwatch, "It's about lunchtime. You hungry?"

Zu nodded enthusiastically. "*Jag är hungrig,"* she chirped.

They went into the basement cafeteria/deli and got a single slice of pizza to share between them. Despite the food being overpriced, one usually got what one paid for. That single slice of pizza was ample enough for them both.

DJ dabbed at his mouth with a napkin, took another draught from his soda-cup and activated his cellphone.

"Let's see if Ellie's called us yet," he said, managing to put on a brave face, despite the bleakness returning to his soul. The phone bleeped and chimed, and finally the main screen swam into focus.

"Let's see here," DJ said, scrolling through the phone's records. "No, no, no, that was yesterday, and . . . Oho, what have we here?" He squinted to inspect the record. Next to the logo "Missed Call" was a phone number from downtown Washington DC. It wasn't Ellie's phone, so who could it be? DJ racked his brain before finally remembering the identity of the caller.

"Pamela!?" he cried. "Pamela finally called?" The memory of the despicable things he had overheard her saying came back to him. Nonetheless, his finger pressed the "call" button, almost of its own volition. After all, maybe it wasn't HIM she had been talking about. There were many other dweeb-ass losers in the world.

An imperious-sounding woman's voice answered on the fifth ring.

"Who may I ask is calling?" asked the voice, by way of a preamble.

"Hi, Pamela," replied DJ. "It's me, DJ. Yeah, you remember, don't you? DJ Newell? Christine's . . . er . . . friend?"

DJ hurriedly jerked the phone away from his ear as the receiver crackled.

"DJ!!!" screamed the voice. "SWEETHEART! It's been SO long since I called you! WHERE have you BEEN, the past two days? I've TRIED and TRIED to get hold of you, but all I got was your voicemail!"

For some reason, the overenthusiastic, ersatz gushiness of Pamela's overwhelmed DJ's sense of discretion, as well as his memory of what he had overheard downtown but a few days before.

"I've been with friends from . . . Well, from out of town," he explained. "I'm sorry I took so long to reply, but you understand how it is." He paused. "Yeah, they're still here in town; at least one of them is." He listened further. "Tonight? Well, I don't see any reas . . . what's that? . . . Down the street from my place? Oh, I see. Yeah, I suppose I could. Huh? Really? No, seriously; you wouldn't mind? Okay, I'll ask her."

DJ removed the phone from his ear and tapped Zu on the shoulder. She had been busy trying to drink the ketchup from a little cardboard cup the server had put on her plate.

"Hey, Zu?" he asked. "Would you like to go out with me this evening when we get home? I'm going to meet a friend at a bar in my neighborhood, and I thought you'd like to come along."

Zu eagerly nodded, but then her face clouded over. "Ellie?" she asked questioningly.

"Well, if Ellie is home by the time we leave, she can come along too, I guess," replied DJ, with little real enthusiasm or optimism. He returned his attention to the cellphone.

"I guess it's a date then," he replied. "Huh? Oh, well, sure, six-thirty sounds fine. Yeah, I'll bring her. There might be somebody else along, too, if that's okay. It is? Fantastic. Yup, see you then." He hung up.

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Pamela snapped her cellphone closed with an expression of violent disgust. That mudgrubbing little amphibian FINALLY called her back. She had swallowed her distaste and feigned a desire to meet up with him for socializing. She had a hunch that those two little catsluts she'd seen him pawing over might come along with him. Well, in that case, double the money, double the fun. She smiled wickedly and licked her poison-apple-red lips in anticipation as she pointed her TransAm in the direction of Gaithersburg. Her contacts had BETTER have things ready.

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Jay's Ferrari slid to a stop in front of the hotel. He and Ellie sat awkwardly for a moment as the rain pattered quietly on the car's convertible roof. Jay's drumming fingers echoed the rain as he stared straight ahead, still too unsettled by the unfolding events to look to his left.

Ellie's hands were folded around her clutch-purse, and she occasionally took a downcast glance over in Jay's direction.

Finally, she sighed and reached for the car's latch. As she exited the car, Jay suddenly sprang into action.

"Ellie, wait!" he cried, thrusting a small black object at her. It was an umbrella. "You'll be needing this." Ellie smiled as she took the umbrella and unfurled it. She crossed over to the driver's side of the car and stooped down so her face was eye-level with Jay's. He lowered the window.

"Please don't ever forget what I told you," she said tenderly, laying a hand lovingly on his arm. "My love for you may have changed, but it hasn't diminished in the slightest."

Jay managed a wan smile and laid his hand atop hers. "I know," he replied. "But if it doesn't work out between you and . . ." he made a vague gesture, "you know, please let me know. I'll always be there for you if you should ever need me."

"Thanks," replied Ellie, smiling warmly. She leaned forward and kissed Jay deeply and sincerely, one last time. After a long moment she stood back in the rain.

"Go ahead and keep the umbrella," Jay told her. "It's a present."

Ellie nodded as the car window went up. The Ferrari switched gears, turned about in the parking lot and cruised away into the rain. She stood there watching for a long, long time after the tail-lights faded away, until it was no longer certain whether the wetness running down her face was from the rain, or whether it was from tears.

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Ellie sighed wearily as she read the note on the front of DJ's apartment door.

She checked her wristwatch again. Four-fifteen. Well, she could stay here and wait for them, but who knew how long they would actually be, or she could wait at the hotel room and rest up. She didn't really think she'd be up for more sightseeing the next day; maybe she could just have some more alone time before seeking DJ out for things to do.

She pulled a pen from her purse and wrote beneath DJ's handwriting:

*Back 4:15. Call me. Ellie. PS Sorry I got back so late.*

Unfurling the umbrella, she turned around and headed back to the car, and from that to the welcome darkness of sleep.

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DJ didn't want to go home yet. It was five minutes after six, and there had been no word from Ellie. Zu had napped the whole Metro trip back to the car and thence back to Gaithersburg, and so now she was rather well-rested.

DJ hadn't been so fortunate, but adrenalin and nerves had kept him going enough to keep from feeling any major fatigue. He cricked his neck and fidgeted his fingers along the curve of the steering wheel, waiting for the latest red light to turn green. They were at the corner of Rockville Pike and Summit Avenue on their way to the tavern where Pamela said she would meet them. DJ's wishes were on the verge of being fulfilled, and it wasn't until this very moment that he realized that he was feeling uneasy without really knowing why. It struck him as somehow odd that after so long a period of incessant disregard, Pamela should suddenly, out of the blue, try to set up a date with him without any preamble or anything. Not only that, but insist that he bring Zu along too. Oh, well, he guessed it really didn't matter, since he'd be up anyway. Maybe even some "hair of the dog" might help him sleep better after the major letdown of the night before. The light finally turned, and the grubby little car continued on down the street, finally reaching the apartment parking lot. The car eased into its customary space and DJ got out.

"C'mon Zu," he said, holding out his hand. "We're walking. Don't worry; it's not far."

The brightly lit streetcorner across from the town park served to illuminate the wooden sign proclaiming:

**OLDE TOWNE GAITHERSBURG**

in cheerful, block-yellow letters. O'Donegal's pub sat across the way from the gigantic locomotive which made up the park's centerpiece. DJ and Zu ambled up to the front entrance and faced the doorman.

He took one look at DJ's driver's license and waved him through, but held out a restraining hand for Zu.

"Hold it little Miss," he said sternly. "Where's your ID?"  
 "Eye-Dee?" asked Zu quizzically.

"Do you have a passport?" asked DJ.

Aha! Zu knew what that was. Fishing around in her clutch-purse she withdrew a small black folder and held it to the doorman.

He gaped at the document in amazement, then at Zu, then back at the passport, and then at Zu again. Finally he shrugged, handing it back.

"Damned if I didn't think she was thirteen," he remarked, scratching his head.

"Sorry," grinned DJ. "You're off by about twelve years." He took hold of the polished-brass doorhandle and he and Zu walked in.

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Pamela's ears pricked up as she heard the clanking of the cowbell tied to the top of the bar's front door. Sure enough, it was that little shitstain DJ and he had . . . aw, shit. He had the little rodent catgirl with him. Pamela had distinctly seen him the other day with two catgirls: The scrawny, mousy one and a large, busty, healthy-looking blonde. Pamela shouldn't have expected that puny boy-man to show some real sense and bring the better-quality specimen with him. Oh, well, SHOWTIME.

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"DJ?" called a voice from across the bar. Zu looked over and immediately tugged on DJ's arm, pointing in the direction of the voice.

A tall, leggy, spray-tanned bleach blonde in a garish orange miniskirt was sauntering over.

DJ waved and took Zu's hand, walking across the already-crowded bar floor to meet her.

"I'm SO sorry that it's taken so long to get together," gushed Pamela, giving him a (nofuckingwhere NEAR fast enough, in her opinion) hug by way of greeting.

"That's OK," replied DJ. "Life does have an annoying tendency to get in the way at times, doesn't it?"  
 This caused Pamela to burst out into forced-sounding laughter.

"Oh, DJ," she gasped, wiping away an imaginary tear, "you ARE the wit, aren't you?" At that moment, she pretended to notice Zu.

"And who is your little sidekick?" Pamela asked, looking down her plastic-surgery-enhanced nose at the pretty-but-plain catgirl and offering a condescending smile. "Would you like a rubber mousie, perhaps? Maybe a . . . oh, maybe a saucer of milk?" Pamela pretended to think it over. "I know! How about some catnip?"

"Her name is Zu Kat," DJ interceded, frowning in puzzlement at Pamela's brash, almost callous-sounding remarks. "She's from Sweden, visiting with a friend."

"Oh, don't be such a stiff, DJ," sniffed Pamela, waving a hand dismissively. "I was merely teasing."

*"Hurst-HurdyGurdy-djordhinga-skjarl-haggenbottir?"* she asked smugly. When Zu's only reply was a blank stare, Pamela shrugged and turned away. "Obviously, she doesn't speak Swedish, in spite of where you said she came from."

*That was gibberish, not Swedish,* DJ thought before quashing the urge to speak his mind. Most likely, Pamela was just kidding again. Sure enough, she was laughing heartily at her own joke.

"So where are you sitting?" asked DJ.

"I'm over at the bar," replied Pamela, returning whence she came. "You can join me if you wish. Is your friend certain she wouldn't like some milk? I'm sure the bartender can come up with some."

"She'll be fine," replied DJ. "Zu *is* twenty-five, after all. She wouldn't have been able to come here in the first place if she was underage."

Something reptilian flashed in Pamela's eyes and was gone again in an instant as the woman seated herself on a barstool, making every effort to show off her long legs and shapely ankles. More than one pair of eyes wandered over and began to figuratively strip her nude right then and there. For her part, Pamela thrived on the attention.

DJ sat down next to her and ordered a beer for himself, and a cola for Zu.

"Where is your other friend?" Pamela wanted to know, sipping at her Mai Tai.

"Other friend?" DJ asked. How had Pamela known about Ellie?

"You mentioned that . . . What was her name? Zub?"

"Zu."

"Zu! You mentioned that *ZUUUUUUUUUUU* was visiting with a friend from SVEEEEDEN." Pamela theatrically crossed her legs and folded her hands over one knee. "So where is she, this 'other friend?'"

"She's . . . out," replied DJ, the pang of the night before returning.

"Is that so?" Pamela said, leaning forward and doing her utmost to feign interest.

DJ took a slug of his beer before beginning to speak.

"She's out with . . . well, a friend," he began, staring off into space. "Ellie and Zu arrived from Sweden last week, and they've been hanging out with me for sightseeing while they're here."

Pamela turned away, rolling her eyes and stifling a yawn. Listening to people's stories that didn't have her at the center could be SO boring.

"How did they end up with *you?"* A faint note of contempt entered that question, but Pamela either didn't notice or didn't care; the same with DJ.

"It's a funny thing, really," replied DJ, the alcohol loosening his tongue. " It all started after I dropped Christine off at Reagan for her flight to Chicago. Zu and Ellie had just landed, and Ellie was checking their bags. Anyway, from what I was . . .\*burp\* . . . told (excuse me), Zu got lost, and stashed herself away in *my* car, and I drove all the way back home with her in the backseat!"

"In the backseat?" Pamela sighed impatiently and checked her wristwatch, *God, doesn't this guy know how to shut up? How fucking long is it going to take that sedative to kick in?*

"Yeah! Thash--er, *That's* the funny thing! She thought that she'd be driven *home,* to *Sweden,* from here in the United States! Ain't that something else?"

Pamela laughed hollowly, her pained expression becoming more and more difficult to conceal.

"Anyway, to make a long story short, Elsie--I mean ELLIE drove all the way from Virg-gi-ginia to pick up Zu, and . . . well, we kinda, y'know, hit it off. Know what I mean?"

Pamela was barely listening.

"Anyway," continued DJ, "Last night, Ellie wanted me to friggen babysit Zu while she went off and made nicey-nice with some guy-friend of hers and the President! The PRESIDENT, for pissakes! I mean, here she was, leading ME on, and NOW she's (hic) going and schmoozing with some guy in front of the President!"

Pamela had had enough. She whipped around, grabbed DJ by the shoulders, and forced his lolling head to steady for a moment and his lazily-rolling eyes to focus on her.

"Now listen to me, DJ," she said solemnly. "I'm going to tell you something I know you won't like, but it's for your own good. YOU WERE BEING USED. It's obvious that that girl doesn't have any feelings for you, and she never did."

"She didn't?"

"No, she didn't. She was just using you for a good time while she was on vacation, and when someone better came along, all you were to her was a temporary babysitter."

"But Zu is twenty-five," objected DJ, having an increasingly difficult time keeping his eyes focused. "Why would she need a babysitter?"

"It doesn't matter," replied Pamela. "That's not the point. What you need to do is, when Elsie (or whatever the fuck her name is) comes back, you just go up to her and give her shit for what she did to you. Believe me, you'll really get what's coming at that point."

"You're right," exclaimed DJ, attempting to rise to his feet. "I'll give that l-li-lilla-little BITCH a thing of my piece, or a mind of my own, or WHATEVER THE FUCK I MEAN!" He staggered towards the door. "You coming?"

Pamela put down her glass.

"I think you need a ride home," she said, her eyes glimmering.

"Fan-fucking-tasmic," said DJ. "You can drive, I'll pay (hic) for the drinks. Where's Zu?" Groggily he turned around and around, looking with blurry, inebriated eyes for his charge.

The untouched cola glass remained on the counter, sweat oozing down onto the counter, the ice-cubes clinking softly against the glass as they melted and changed their positions.

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Zu had never been in a bar of any kind before, let alone in an American tavern. Not only were there many, many people there, there was the loud rumble of many conversations, and a swirling kaleidoscope of lights, figures, clothes, glints off brass and glass, and all sorts of unusual smells. There was the reek of spilled beer, the rich smell of varnished wood, the tart tang of polished brass.

She had been thoroughly turned against Pamela by her unrecognizable words, and bored by the lack of attention she had been getting from DJ. So, while the two of them were immersed in discussion, Zu took it on herself to explore the bar. She slid off her barseat and made her way through the throngs of bargoers to the back. The first thing she noticed was a heavy oak door which was ajar. Naturally, due to her inquisitive nature, she made a beeline straight for it.

Peeking around the edge, she got blasted in the face by a billowing cloud of blue. Immediately she coughed and recoiled, rubbing at her stinging, watering eyes. Her next attempt was more successful. Before her was a stairway leading downwards, dimly illuminated at intervals by flickering wall sconces. The wood paneling was nearly black and the ceiling tiles stained a dark brown from the heavy, oily cloud of cigarette smoke which permeated the air. Zu coughed again, grasped the brass handrail and started down.

A rumble of masculine voices punctuated by rough laughter and loud "clacks" bubbled up from below. The door at the bottom of the stairway was open and she peered into the room.

Through the heavy cigarette smoke she could just make out two pool tables and a row of large disks on the back wall. She giggled when she saw them, remarking to herself that they were checked black and white, just like Ellie's favorite skirt.

"Hey there, little girl," said a hoarse voice. "What are you doin there? C'mon in!" A rough, knotted hand held the door open. It belonged to a large, burly, grizzle-bearded man wearing a red-plaid lumbershirt and blue jeans. "What's your name?"

"I am Zu Kat," replied Zu. "I am from Sweden."

"Oh! You're from Sweden, eh?" remarked someone else. "Didn't they invent sex?" A lusty gleam appeared in his eye.

"Shut up, Mike," said Grizzle-Beard. He ushered Zu into the room. "Ya want a beer, little Missy?" Zu looked at him in puzzlement. Rather than answer, she walked about the room, slowly examining the pool tables (much to the consternation and annoyance of the players, (some of whom uttered four-letter words at her under their breaths) and running her fingers along the polished wood of the rims.

At last, she reached the open rear of the game room. She picked up a dart and looked at it quizzically.

"You ever play darts?" asked Grizzle-Beard. Zu turned her puzzled look at him.

"Here, see," he explained, taking the dart from her hands and showing her how to hold it, "ya hold the dart like this, and then ya throw it," he gave the dart a strong toss. It shot through the air and impaled itself, quivering, on a black square in the upper right of the target. "Well anyway, what you NEED to do," he continued, walking up to the target, "is to hit this red dot, right here in the center. Understand?"

Zu didn't understand most of what was being said, but she thought that she got the gist. All one had to do was to hit the red dot with the pointy thing and she'd win. She shrugged and nodded, grabbing another dart and walking up to the target.

"Whoah, whoah!" cried Grizzle-Beard, pulling her backwards. "You need to throw" he marched her back, back, across the floor, "from back here." He mimed tossing the dart like he had thrown it before. "Just give it a good toss."

Zu toed the line and held the dart the same way the man had. Goodness, that target was far! She drew back the dart, took a deep breath and let fly.

CHONK!!

At that moment, the target-board erupted into pandemonium. Lights flashed, sirens went off, and horns sounded.

"Uh-oh!" chortled the bartender from upstairs. "Sounds like someone got a bulls-eye! Five free darts!"

"Well, go get your darts, Zu!" chuckled Grizzle-Beard. Somebody near the door disappeared upstairs and presently returned with Zu's five darts.

"Bullshit," snorted Mike. "That was just one shot. Everybody can make one. Let her do it again!"

"Oh, I suppose. She does have five shots! Go ahead and try again, Zu."

Zu nodded and assumed the position.

CHONK!

"Oh my God," shouted the bartender. "Another bulls-eye! Five more free darts!"

CHONK!

"Wow!"

CHONK!

"Is everybody seeing this!?"

CHONK!

"This is incredible!"

CHONK!

"I've never seen anything like this before!"

CHONK!

"UN-BE-FRIGGING-LIEVABLE!"

CHONK!

"Is somebody even keeping score!?"

CHONK!

By this time, the crowd had increased, and was amazed by the innate prowess Zu was showing at darts.

CHONK!

"If she keeps this up, it'll be a store rec . . . shit . . . A WORLD'S record!"

CHONK!

"I just ran out of darts!"

CHONK!

"Somebody get that girl a drink!"

A dozen fists shot up in the air, each one holding money. Presently, several drinks were passed up to the dartboards. Zu looked in surprise at them all, unsure of what to do.

"Go ahead and drink," replied Grizzle-Beard. "They're all for you, anyhow."

Zu had never tried beer, but she had an idea of what it was. At any rate, it wasn't for her. She knitted her brow in thought, finally selecting one which was a bright, pretty blue color. She raised the glass to her lips and drank. A small, white object bobbed and drifted on the bottom for a few seconds before dissolving into nothingness.

By this time, Pamela had completely tuned out the now-hopelessly-weepy-babbling-and-drunk DJ and was staring long and hard downstairs towards the game room, now full of men.

The reptilian look returned to her eyes, and a slow, icy grin crossed her lips.

This is good! Zu thought as she took another swallow of the drink. It tastes sweet, and fuzzy, and it's all warm and tickly inside me. This last thought made her giggle, thinking as she was of Sixten, no doubt pining for her back home.  *Poor guy. He didn't have anyone to snuggle with, other than me,* she thought. *Well, maybe he could get himself off just once*. For now, Zu was having too much fun! She finished off her drink, and before she even knew it, another one was pressed into her hand. Eagerly, she downed that one, and then another. She giggled again out loud, and flipped up the back of her dress to the men, revealing her blue-striped panties.

The crowd went berserk, cheering and yelling and jostling for a better view. Suddenly, they all hushed. Zu had returned to the aiming line, though her gait was by now a bit unsteady. She grabbed two darts from the pile she had amassed, and threw them simultaneously.

CHONK-CHONK! A double-bullseye!

Again there was an enthusiastic uproar. Somebody closed the gameroom door for a bit more privacy.

Zu was really having fun now. She laughed out loud and clapped with the men whenever she scored a hit. They cheered and laughed back. With a mischievous, flirty grin, Zu suddenly lifted off her top and sent it flying towards the dartboards, in place of a dart.

The uproar which had thundered through the air before was nothing compared to what sounded out now. Men jostled each other even harder to get a good view of her tiny, perfect breasts while digital cameras clicked like firecrackers.

Zu reached for another dart, but this time it wasn't a dart. It felt much bigger and thicker, strangely firm yet yielding, and seemed to be very warm, almost hot, and pulsing strongly. She looked down and found out that the man behind her had dropped his trousers and what she had gotten hold of was his penis.

He guffawed and began humping her hand. "Let's try some target practice with this, baby!" he roared. The crowd bawled and bellowed with laughter in reply.

Zu had gone too far into her drinks by now to be frightened. She grinned indolently at him and began stroking.

"Yeah, baby," the man muttered. "Work it good, baby." Zu continued jerking the guy off, oblivious to the crowd now massing around her. Another dick appeared by her right hand, and she obligingly began to stroke that off, too.

Her head was swimming round and round, and she began to sway and weave on her feet until suddenly, with a "plunk," her bum hit the floor.

In that second, they were on her. Hands were all over her, rubbing her stomach, her thighs, kneading her breasts and pulling on her nipples. In a split second her dress and panties were pulled off, and she dimly felt her legs being spread apart through the haze of her inebriation.

"Lemme get a taste of that prime pussy!" somebody croaked gutturally. Two more penises were thrust into her hands and a third began to press against her mouth. To avoid choking, she opened her lips and felt it thrust in all the way, until she felt the man's sac bumping against her nose and his glans rubbing the back of her throat. The musky odor was nearly overpowering as he started bucking and heaving his hips, driving his rod in and out of her mouth. She felt no pain, but the sensation was far, far different than the time she spent with DJ. He had been gentle and compassionate while these men were lusty, demanding and aggressive.

Two hair-covered legs scissored over her ribcage and a thick, heavy engorged shaft strongly working its way up and down between her breasts. The man reached down and pressed her breastflesh together around his dick, titfucking her even more strongly now that some friction had been applied.

Suddenly, Zu felt her ass being raised into the air and a heavy, hairy pelvis slide beneath her. Somehow the man had gotten some lubrication, because the next thing she felt was his rod impaling her ass. The sting of being anally penetrated was blunted by the alcohol and the lube, and so she felt it with a sort of bemused detachment rather than fear.

Another man straddled her from above and positioned his cockhead at the entrance to her soaking-wet, glistening pussy. With a shove, he was in and began to rut heavily with her, his rod relentlessly moving in and out of her lovebox.

"Hey, Shithead!" bellowed the first man. "I said I wanted to taste it first!" The man who was fucking Zu's pussy got roughly yanked off and pulled aside cursing indignantly. The puller was hauled roughly to his feet while a brutal right-cross pummeled his jaw. Far from being rendered unconscious, he returned with a left-hook and with fists flying, the brawl was on.

Meanwhile, a swarthy guy with bleachblond hair knelt inbetween Zu's thighs, spread her vaginal petals with his rough thumbs and began to run his tongue in and out of her cleft, teasing her clitoris and sucking noisily on her labia.

Zu's eyes rolled back in her head as the man fucking her throat redoubled his grunting efforts. She gripped the penises in her hands and started stroking them even harder as she was worked by cocks in all directions; her mouth, her hands, her tits, her ass and her pussy were all filled to bursting with white-hot sexmeat. Many of the spectators, frustrated at being left out, had either whipped out their own cocks and were furiously masturbating at the sight, or were stamping impatiently, waiting for their turns at rutting with the small, accomodating catgirl now laying prone before them.

With a sudden stabbing thrust, the man fucking her ass grunted and growled, grabbing her hips and shoving up into her as far as he could go. Zu could feel his dick pulsing and thumping as it churned out its contents, flooding her insides with a thick, sticky white filling of cum.

At the same moment the man fucking her throat spasmed and shot his load into her, forcing her to swallow as fast as she could, and the men she was jerking off fountained their semen all over her torso.

It seemed to be raining cum inside the bar's game room, due to all the ejaculate flying everywhere as the spectators managed to reach orgasm with a loud, collective groan and shudder.

Zu herself was even caught up in the moment. She felt her pussy-muscles tighten further and further, and with an explosion, she also came, pouring her sex-juices into the eagerly waiting mouth of the man torturing her cleft with his tongue.

Finally, with the very end of her strenght, Zu managed to roll off the man beneath her and lay there prone, covered head-to-foot in cum, pussy-juices, saliva and nobody-knew-what-else. Her eyes closed and blackness overtook her.

Before the unserviced spectators could get their own rocks off on Zu's supine form, a loud crackle issued from the PA speaker on the wall

"Last call, everybody," announced the barkeep from upstairs. "Happy hour is now over. Last call! That means pack up and get moving, boys!"

With exhausted, groggy groans and mutters, the men got sheepishly to their feet and began to collect their clothes.

Zu remained still for a long time, her body twitching and spasming involuntarily. With a small groan, she rolled over onto her stomach and laboriously managed to get her arms and legs beneath her.

Where were her clothes? Groggily she looked around. Ah, there they were. How did they get over there? The entire room was spinning, and the manic orgy of just a few minutes before was already passing into hazy memory, as was the dull ache in her .

She was covered head-to-foot in cum, spilled beer, sweat, and who-knew-what-else. She stank, too. When she got back she'd spend a long, long time in the shower.

After several moments of struggling she was dressed and staggering back up the stairs.

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DJ convulsively clutched the corner of O'Donegal's outside wall as he waited for Pamela to arrive with her car. A horde of rough-looking men exited the bar, all laughing and boasting about some sexual conquests they had made, some bro-fisting and others high-fiving each other as they went.

"Damn, she was hot!"

"Shit! Did you see how many she had going all at once! Fuckin' cool, dude!"

"Hey, man!" one of them said, draping an arm companionable about DJ's shoulders, "you missed one helluva ride downstairs just now! We got some chick to go down on SIX of us at once! How the fuck can you believe that!" Guffawing, the man let go and disappeared into the night, just as Pamela's TransAm rounded the corner.

At that moment, Zu, giggling and clutching a handful of tavern darts, wove her way unsteadily toward DJ. She gave a huge wave of her hand as an exaggerated greeting. She stumbled forward and threw her arms around DJ's neck and smiled drunkenly at him.

"*Hej, pappa!"* she slurred.  *"Vet du vad? Det gör* (hic) *ont i min rumpa* (burp)!"

She tried to press her lips against his, but she went wide of the mark and ended up with her nose in his ear. Her breath, reeking of alcohol, boiled in his sinuses.

DJ had no idea why Zu was so sticky, but he did his best to hold her up on her feet.

"Hey!" shouted Pamela, all pretenses of amity gone, "are you two deadbeats getting in, or what? I got shit to do, dammit!"

DJ and Zu staggered over and poured themselves into the front passenger's seat of Pamela's car. It was a two-seater, so Zu had to sit on DJ's lap. The T-top door hissed closed.

"If either of you barf on the upholstery, you're paying for it," growled Pamela, shifting the car into drive.

Fortunately, it was a short drive down the block to DJ's apartment, and they made it in just under three minutes. A good thing too, since the Mickey-Finns they had both drunk were now undoubtedly taking effect.

At last, and not a moment too soon for Pamela, they reached the parking space. With their last vestiges of strength, DJ and Zu exited the car and made their way towards the front door of the building.

Without warning, they both mis-stepped on a single concrete riser which sent them sprawling into the grass. They hit the ground hard, locked in each others's arms and lay there motionless, DJ snoring away with his nose full of sod.

Pamela stood over them, looking down with cold, unsympathetic eyes. She cast a suspicious look around as she flipped on her cellphone. The number she dialed was substantially longer than 911, and it rang for quite a bit longer. When the line finally connected, she was ready.

"YES DOCTOR," she almost shouted at the cellphone, for the benefit of anyone who happened to be listening, "WE HAVE AN UNCONSCIOUS INDIVIDUAL AT 440 BROOKMEADE ROAD. COULD YOU PLEASE SEND AN AMBULANCE AS QUICKLY AS YOU CAN!? YES?? OKAY, THANK YOU! GOOD-BYE!" She clicked the phone off and returned to her car. She engaged the shift again and drove off into the night. as she redialed the number.

"Hans?" she hissed. "It's a go. I've done my part, so now you do yours. Yeah, they're there. You know where to go. Right. Bye." She severed the connection.

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With a sigh and a shudder, Ellie awoke. She looked at the time, and immediately came fully awake. It was after eleven-thirty at night! Goddamn it, she had overslept again!

Cursing, she stripped out of her formal clothes. Forgoing a bra, she shrugged on a camisole top and flannel workshirt, and pulled on her blue-jeans, socks and sneakers. Fumbling for her carkeys she left the hotel suite and was soon driving towards DJ's apartment.

Out of nowhere, a large white van with the letters "ECNALUBMA" roared by, its lights spinning and blazing, its siren keening madly. It careened around a corner and was gone.

The streetlights were buzzing in the night as she pulled up to a stop next to DJ's car.

Thank God, she thought, they're home. Not that I was any help, though. Dammit, DJ, I am SO sorry.

There were no lights on in DJ's window, and nobody waited outside. Ellie moved down the walkway past a rumpled patch of grass and opened the door.

She froze when she reached DJ's front door. It had yielded easily to her touch and proved to be unlocked. Not only that, but the lock had been smashed.

Slowly she eased the door open and peered within. It was too dark for her to see much, but what she saw turned her heart to ice.

Nothing was intact. There was furniture overturned, books thrown this way and that, DJ's precious fossil collection now lay on the floor, many of the specimens shattered. Ellie's breathing quickened as she recoiled in shock.

*It's all my fault,* she thought.  *I spent too much time on myself and neglected DJ and Zu, and this is what happened. It's all my fault!* Blinking away tears, she spun around back into the hallway.

"Well, lookie who we got here, 'Phazio?" said an unctuous voice as two dreadlocked figure, one tall and lanky, the other shorter and stockier, emerged from the shadows outside. Dread stepped into the illuminated circle thrown by the hall-light. "If'n it ain't Sweet-Thang from de other day! Ya know, Baby, we both been thinkin' about you a lot, an' what we thinkin is dis: You best be comin' with us, if you know what's good for you."

"What do you want from me?" asked Ellie, eyes wide with fear. She pressed herself as close against the wall as she could, frantically wishing for DJ to come rescue her, or Za or Jay or anybody!

"Oh, you know what we want," replied Dread. 'Phazio slid to Ellie's other side, effectively blocking her in. "we want YOU."

A blinding yellow flash appeared in Ellie's eyes, and she saw no more.

**TO BE CONTINUED**