

The World Turned Upside Down

Book 6 of *A Well-Lived Life 3*

by Michael Loucks

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I. Who Was That Man?

December 24, 2002, Christmas Eve, Chicago, Illinois

 Birgit

"MOM!" I screamed. "MOM! COME QUICK! IT'S DAD! HE FAINTED!"

I'd seen him sag to the floor, and he was leaning against the jamb, with some strange guy asking him if he was OK. I hurried over to Dad and he looked dazed. A few seconds later, both my moms came running to the foyer along with everyone else.

"Kara, get my bag from our room! Quick!" Mom said to Mom.

Mom dashed away and up the stairs.

"Steve?" my mom the doctor said to Dad. "Steve!"

"Sir, what happened?" Suzanne asked the guy at the door.

"I'm not sure," the guy said. "I was talking to him, he turned pale, sagged, and slid down along the frame of the door.

"What did you say?!" Mom the doctor demanded.

"I'm not sure I should share it with anyone else," he said.

"I'm OK, Jess," Dad said, sounding a bit weak and groggy.

"I'll decide that!" Mom the doctor said fiercely.

"I can stand," Dad said, shaking his head as if to clear it.

"Don't you dare!" Mom the doctor said fiercely.

My other mom came back with the black doctor's bag and Mom the doctor took out her stethoscope and blood pressure cuff and checked on dad. She said his pulse was 80, which was high, and his blood pressure was 80/50, which was low, even for him. I remembered what Grandpa Al and Doctor Mary had said, and in a couple minutes, both those would change, and his pulse would be in the low 60s and his BP up to 90/60.

"Jess, it's clearing," Dad said. "Help me up and to my study. Ask Mr. Samet to come in. I'll explain after I talk to him."

"What happened?" Mom the doctor demanded to know.

"Not now, Jess," Dad said. "I'm fine."

"No, you are not!" Mom said fiercely. "You had a syncopal episode! You haven't had one in a long time."

"I know," Dad replied. "Can we move inside and close the door, please? And invite Mr. Samet in."

My moms helped Dad stand up and move inside, and the stranger stepped into the house. I closed the door behind him, and look suspiciously at him, wondering what he'd said to Dad that had caused Dad to have what Mom called a 'syncopal event'.

"I can walk to my study," Dad said. "Please, this is very important and I have to speak to Mr. Samet alone."

"He's serious, Jess," Mom said. "Maybe you should let him?"

"Do I tell you how to handle polymer experiments?" Mom snapped at Mom.

"Jess, please," I said. "I need to do this. It's critically important."

"What's more important than your health?"

"Nothing, but I'm home, you're here, and Mr. Samet will call you if there's a problem. Please, Jess."

"Mom, I think we should," Albert interjected. "It has to be very important, or he'd listen to you."

Mom fumed, but she was outnumbered, and eventually we walked Dad to his study, and Albert brought Mr. Samet in. Once they were both sitting in the big leather chairs, I offered tea or coffee, but they both declined and everyone left the room, closing the doors behind us.

 Steve

"Are you OK?" Steve Samet asked once we were sitting in my study.

"I have a minor medical condition and one of the ways it manifests is syncopal episodes -- fainting spells. My wife is a trauma surgeon and is obviously concerned, but doctors at Mayo, Johns Hopkins, and Karolinska in Sweden don't believe it's life-threatening. It happens when my blood glucose is around what is normal for most people and I receive shocking information."

"I'm sorry. I probably shouldn't have just blurted that out, but you were suspicious and I suspected you were about to send me away."

"I was. You're going to have to explain how you ended up here, and not at my dad's house."

"Because the only document my private investigator has found so far with his name on it, along with an address, is this house. We found a marriage license in Los Angeles, but it was a dead-end because there were no property records with his name in California."

It dawned on me just then that literally everything was either in my mom's name as Judy Deye, or if my dad *had* to put his name on something, he'd used 'Ray Deye'. And I knew he'd used corporations, such as X&B Investment Corporation, to keep his name off many things. I wondered, then, why he'd allowed his name on the deed to the house. That was an interesting question to ask in the future.

"You're going to have to explain how we get from point A to point B," I said.

"Do you believe me?"

"I don't disbelieve you," I replied. "I need more information to evaluate your claim."

"I was born out of wedlock in January 1950 to Marion Fitz and Lewis B. Hano. They married in September of that year. They divorced when I was around five and my mom married Gilbert Samet, and my surname was changed. I don't remember much about my birth dad, and Mom wasn't interested in helping me find him, so I started with what I knew -- his name and birthdate, and his New York residence. So little is stored in computers, so it took quite a bit of work in archives, but eventually the investigator found enough information to connect Lewis B. Hano with Lewis B. Tobias.

"His name was changed from Tobias to Hano when his mother, our grandmother, remarried, though there is quite a bit we can't figure out. There is some evidence he was in an orphanage at some point. We also found that our grandfather married our grandmother about two months after his first wife died of Spanish Flu, and our dad, if you'll allow me to call him that, was born five months later."

"Oops."

"Yeah. Anyway, I tracked down some military records, but then everything disappeared, and there was no record at all of Lewis B. Hano anywhere. The investigator found some tenuous link between a man named Ray Adams and Lewis Hano, and when birthdates, birthplaces, and other information lined up, and through the internet site ancestry.com, he finally found the marriage certificate in Los Angeles County, along with your birth certificate and that of your brother. I guess you have a sister, too."

And he didn't find hers in Los Angeles County because she was born in Palm Springs, which was in Riverside County. Remembering that triggered a memory of my first NASCAR race at Riverside Raceway. I quickly pushed that aside and concentrated on the topic had hand.

"If all of that is true," I said, "then you know my mom's name, and should have been able to track her down. Or my brother."

"The PI said that despite searching, he found zero references to 'Ray Adams' in any public records, and wasn't sure where he might have landed, or if he was still married. Because that was a dead end, he followed your trail, which was easy. He found you in Chicago, and turned up the deed for this house, which actually has your dad's name on it. The PI called me with the information

yesterday, and I drove down from Michigan to see you face-to-face. Had that not worked, we'd have followed your brother's trail."

Which, if they could search criminal records, would have led him directly to my dad, as Jeff still lived at home.

"I'm going to guess you have a report from the PI that documents everything you just told me?"

"Yes."

"Please don't take this the wrong way, but what exactly do you want?" I asked.

"Nothing other than to meet my dad. If I could have done it without disturbing you, I would have."

"And the rest of your family?"

"Estranged," Mr. Samet said. "I haven't seen my stepdad or my mom in over twenty years, nor my siblings."

"You'll pardon me if I find this all a bit far-fetched."

"And yet, your tone and demeanor say you think what I'm saying might be credible, and you're trying to decide what to do."

"If what you say is true, it paints a very different picture of my dad than the one he's related to me, but more importantly, what he told my mom. If all of this turns out to be true, it could blow apart my parents' marriage. Is it that important to you?"

"If you were in my shoes, what would YOU do?" he asked.

"That's a damned good question," I replied. "I suspect I wouldn't be able to let it go. When was the last time you saw your dad?"

"Around 1953, or about ten years before you were born, because he and my mom separated. But you know what makes me certain?"

"No."

"Both our names are the same, albeit with alternate spelling."

"Which names?" I asked.

"You don't know?" he asked.

"Know what?"

"Your birth certificate originally read 'Steven Marc' but was corrected to 'Stephen Mark' about two months after you were born.

And with that, I knew he was right. There was no doubt in my mind.

"I didn't know that, but my Social Security Card, which was issued when I was a baby, something extremely rare in those days, had my name spelled 'M-A-R-C'. I had the SSA correct it a few years ago, to match my birth certificate."

"It was 'Steven Marc' there, too, but changed about the time your birth certificate was changed. They obviously made an error correcting it."

"Son of a bitch," I said, shaking my head. "You're not going to let it go, I'm sure, and figuring out where he is would be a hop, skip, and a jump now that you've confirmed my identity and his. Will you do something for me?"

"What's that?" Mr. Samet asked.

"Agree to not make this public? That is, don't link anything on ancestry.com, and don't reveal it to anyone else? If you agree, I'll see if I can arrange for you to meet my dad, and we'll find out the truth together."

"I have no reason to out him or reveal anything. When could I meet him?"

"Ultimately, it'll be up to him if he wants to meet you. If he says 'no', what will you do?"

"I suppose I have to honor that. Do you think he'll refuse?"

"I think if I set up a completely private meeting that nobody knows about but you, me, and him, there's a good chance he'll say 'yes'. I'll speak to him and see what he has to say. If he's amenable, I'll arrange a completely private meeting for the three of us."

"That would work."

"OK. Let me have your contact information, I'll speak to him today and try to set up the meeting."

"What are you going to say?"

"I suppose the best approach is to say that someone approached me with a proposition and I felt he should listen to it. A bit of subterfuge, but I think he'll forgive me for that. If he says 'yes', I'll get some proposed dates from him and get in touch with you."

"I can accept that, and I promise no matter what happens, to not violate anyone's privacy or do anything that would wreck your parents' marriage. What will you tell your wife?"

It wasn't 'wife', it was 'wives', which presented an interesting set of challenges, as did telling my daughter. I didn't like keeping secrets, though some had to be kept. I trusted my wives, but this information was like a container of nitroglycerin, and one small bobble might set it off.

"That's tricky, and I'm not sure. I need to think about it."

"I'll leave you, because I want to get back to Michigan."

"I'm somewhat surprised you traveled on Christmas Eve."

"You don't know that, either?"

It dawned on me, and was something I'd speculated about, and now I knew.

"You're Jewish, and so was your Dad."

"Yes."

"You just clarified something I suspected, at least based on the family name."

"Our grandfather was Jewish, and our great grandparents on our grandmother's side were Russian Jews who emigrated."

"Damn!" I said, shaking my head.

"What?"

"I have a number of Russian friends, many of them made before the Berlin Wall came down, and I never had an inkling I might have Russian blood."

"You're a true believer now?" Steve Samet asked.

"So many little things add up that did not add up before. I'm curious, but did you uncover anything about his military service or work for a government agency?"

"He was mustered out of the Naval Reserves in 1952, and his last assignment we can find was USS *Biddle*. As for government agencies, by which I'm sure you mean the CIA, that was the speculation the investigator made based on complete disappearance of records and not finding ANY records for Ray Adams or Lewis Hano between 1953 and 1961."

Dad had never mentioned *Biddle* and I wondered if that was part of some OSS subterfuge, or information I simply didn't have because Dad hadn't told me the whole story.

"I know some other details that fit," I said. "He met my mom in Las Vegas in 1961 and was there because he was friends with Cuban expatriates. I also met a man who met my dad in Cuba and knew him as Lewis B. Hano. So if we add our two stories together, I think that part is as he said. But the 1950s are a complete blank in everything I know, and allegedly he worked for the OSS, then the CIA."

"He had a TV business in New York after the war."

"I'm positive you made THAT connection?"

"Which?"

I laughed, "What are my dad's initials?"

"Oh crap!" Steve Samet exclaimed with a smile. "I missed that one! RCA!"

"Yeah," I replied with a smile of my own.

"I'll leave you to your holiday celebration. I'm assuming you're Christian?"

"Agnostic. Let me walk you out."

"Was the second blonde my half-sister?"

"No," I replied, hoping he'd drop it.

"OK. You're obviously being circumspect, and I get that, so I won't press. I very much appreciate you talking to me and being honest with me, and I've very sorry about causing you to faint."

"It's OK," I said. "I'm not sure it could have been avoided."

We got up, I walked him to the door, shook hands and walked to the sunroom and suppressed a sigh.

"Hi, Al," I said. "I'm fine."

"I'll be the judge of that! Your study, now!"

Fighting Al would only make things worse with Jessica, so I complied, and we went to my study where Al did a much more through exam.

"So?" I asked.

"Your vitals are in the normal range for you. Did you eat carbs this morning?"

"No. I had a few, and I mean few, last night in San Francisco because I was in the Admiral's Club and the selection was limited. I took propranolol proactively, and I slept fairly well on the red eye back to Chicago."

"Define 'few'."

"An apple with my first meal of cold cuts and cheese, with a slice of whole grain bread, that was around 5:00pm. Then around 9:00pm, a banana, cold cuts, cheese, and a slice of whole grain bread. No soda, no desserts, no candy, no cookies. Only water to drink, though I didn't drink anything on the flight because I slept, so I might be a bit dehydrated. I did drink water and a mug of tea with my breakfast of bacon and eggs."

"That's the complete truth?" Al asked.

"Yes. I followed my diet strictly in San Francisco. I even passed on the fantastic bread that Ruth's Chris serves, and had a double order of broccoli, substituting for the potatoes. I also had a decent amount of exercise."

"Then what in the seven hells caused you to have a syncopal episode?"

"Al, I can't share that," I said firmly.

"Who was that guy you just walked out?"

"His name is Steve Samet, and I just met him today. I can't tell you more."

"Why not?"

"Answering that would tell you more. I honestly cannot say."

"Steve, you know me," Al said. "I won't judge and I won't violate your privacy."

"If I tell you, you cannot repeat this to a single person, ever. I mean that. You can't even mention it to me unless I bring it up first."

"What the hell?" he asked.

"Do you agree?"

"Yes. Call it doctor-patient confidentiality because it caused a medical incident."

"Barring a deception worthy of the KGB or MI6 on their best days, the man who was just here is my half-brother."

"What?!" Al asked, his face showing extreme surprise.

"You heard me," I said. "Everything lines up and it appears my dad was married in the early 1950s, and had kids, at least one out of wedlock, under the name he said he used in Cuba, which, by the way, Felipe confirmed."

"You're sure this guy isn't some kind of fraudster?"

"Positive? No. But so much lines up."

"Out of wedlock?"

"He was born in January 1950 and my dad married his mom in September of that year."

"How did he link the names?"

"Something an investigator found on the website ancestry.com, which has old records, with more being added each day. Somehow he linked the names, then

traced the scarce facts to find my parents' marriage certificate. He couldn't find my dad because, well, of things I know about my dad, which I can't share. The investigator found my birth certificate, then found me, and found my dad's name on the deed, so Mr. Samet was sure he had come to the right place."

"I think I can see why you had an episode! What are you going to do?"

"If my dad agrees, set up a meeting for Thursday, and let my dad decide what to do after that. Maybe the guy is a fraudster, but if so, the story he spun won't help because if he isn't my dad's son, my dad will say so. Also, how hard would it be to actually track down my dad now that he knows where I live, and simply needs to trace my history, or locate my brother? The company website gives my bio and refers to Milford and Cincinnati, and names my dad as an investor and member of the Board, but with only basic details. Given that, how long do you think it would take someone to find my brother, who still lives with my parents?"

"Why didn't he go directly to your dad?"

"Everything was always in my mom's maiden name, or as 'Ray Deye'. My dad also used a corporation to hide ownership of businesses and properties. I always thought it was to keep his new identity hidden because of the CIA, but now I wonder."

"You think he was hiding from the previous family?"

"I don't know," I replied. "That's the key -- I don't know. But at this point, I'm basically forced to do something because inaction is worse than action. Fundamentally, if I do nothing, Steve Samet will absolutely try to get in touch with my dad. I'd rather have that meeting in a situation I can control than have him show up at my dad's door in the next few weeks."

"What's your plan?"

"The more I think about it, the more I think I should tell my dad what I know, rather than surprise him."

"That is probably best, rather than create a possible confrontation. If your dad refuses, for whatever reason, will this man drop it?"

"He claimed he would, but I obviously don't know him well enough to know for sure."

"What does your famous gut say?"

"That Steve Samet is trustworthy."

"Next question -- assuming your dad says 'no', are *you* going to stay in touch with this man and try to put together your dad's entire history?"

"I don't know, Al. One step at a time, OK?"

"Sorry."

"It's OK. Will you tell Jessica I'm fine? She'll believe you. I'll still have the problem of not disclosing anything."

"That's a hell of a secret to keep, if it's true."

"I know. Given you know, do me a favor, and use the subterfuge of the exam to let me call my dad and see what he wants to do. At least then I'll have an idea if I can share this knowledge with anyone else while my mom is still alive."

"Make your call."

I nodded, went to my desk and dialed my parents' house in Mason. Thankfully, Dad answered.

"Hi, Dad."

"Hi, Son. Aimee confirmed she'll deliver us to Meigs at 8:00am on Thursday."

"Great! We're looking forward to seeing you. I do have a question to ask you."

"What's that?"

"Do you know a Steven Marc Hano, son of Lewis Hano and Marion Fitz?"

There was dead silence on the other end of the line, and I knew instantly that what Steve Samet had revealed was true. Had it not been, Dad would simply have answered 'no'.

"Where did you hear those names?" he asked after about twenty seconds.

"Steven Hano, now Steven Samet, showed up at my door an hour ago, looking for Ray Adams, whose name is on the deed to this house, and who he had, through a private investigator, tied to Lewis B. Hano and Lewis Betram Tobias."

"God damn," my dad said quietly. "What did you tell him?"

"At first, when he said the names, I said I couldn't help him. When he said he was my half-brother, I had a syncopal episode. When I recovered, we spoke for about fifteen minutes. I revealed nothing about where you live or what you do, but he knew things that you told me, that I've never heard anywhere else."

"What did he want?"

"To see you. I only committed to telling you he wanted to see you. He promised that if you refuse, he'll go away. If you do want to see him, I'll set something up for Thursday."

"That part of my life no longer exists," Dad said firmly. "Nobody was ever supposed to know. Do you know where he found the information?"

"A combination of physical records searches and an internet site. It was the internet site that gave him the clue he needed to find your marriage license in California. He did try to find other, but received no information at all. I'm surmising that meant a manual records search that was fruitless, for reasons I can deduce that include using 'Ray Deye' and 'X&B Investment Corporation', as well as everything being in Mom's maiden name."

"I was afraid there were loose ends, especially after the FBI asked you about me."

"What do you want to do?"

"Nothing. I can't reopen that chapter in my life without risking major fallout, and not just with your mom. There are other things you do not know."

"I figured. Is he your son?"

"Yes."

"I can tell him you won't see him, and my gut says he's trustworthy, but there are no guarantees I've read him correctly."

"There's a reason the Navy men don't want you to play in poker tournaments, Son! You are an expert at reading people."

"The stakes appear to be much bigger than a \$1500 poker payout."

"They are. Promise me two things, please."

"What's that?"

"You'll say nothing to anyone about this, and you won't go digging into my past. I will tell you more in about ten years."

"About that. One other person knows."

"Who?"

"Al Barton. He's actually here with me right now. Jess called him when I had the syncopal episode and I agreed never to withhold relevant information from Al about any health concerns. He'll classify this as doctor-patient confidentiality. He's the easy one; I'll have a heck of a time finessing it with Jess and Kara, but I will."

"No further than Al, Son. It has to stop there. Tell Mr...what was his name?"

"Samet."

"Tell Mr. Samet that he should cease and desist. Use whatever language you think will work. And you forget everything you heard."

"You know that's not possible. May I ask one question?"

"One, but I may not be able to answer now."

"Your maternal grandparents were Russian Jews who emigrated to the US?"

"Yes. And yes, I'm Jewish. Well, ethnically, anyway."

"Thanks. I'd say this matter is closed for discussion until sometime in 2011, when fifty years have passed."

"Thank you, Son. Do your best to convince Mr. Samet that I don't, and can't, know him, and do not want any contact."

"I'll do what I can, Dad. See you Thursday."

We said 'goodbye' and I hung up.

"I infer he asked you not to say anything," Al observed. "And asked you to find a way to make this man understand he's not welcome?"

"Yes," I replied. "My problem, of course, is my natural curiosity is going to eat at me, and my dad asked for a promise that I won't dig into his past."

"I didn't hear you promise anything."

I smiled, "I actually didn't, directly, but I believe I implied it strongly enough for him to infer my compliance."

"You didn't give your word, which is what matters for you. May I give my perspective as someone who had serious complications in his life and kept them hidden?"

"Yes."

"The truth eventually comes out, and it's much better if you can manage it than allow it to manage you."

He had a point, given all the things that had happened with Jessica and him when the truth had come out inadvertently.

"Thanks, Al. That's what I needed to hear."

"What are you going to tell Jessica?" he asked.

"Hell if I know," I sighed. "Later today, I'll give Mr. Samet a call and give him what I'm sure will be unwelcome news."

"Let me know if I can help. I won't say anything to your dad unless he says something to me."

"Thanks, Al. Just make sure you give me a clean bill of health with Jess. Mary and Don will be here on Thursday, so I'm sure Jess will insist Mary thoroughly examine me."

"In your dreams, Kid!" Al replied with a grin.

"Been there, done that," I replied flatly.

"You dog!" he chuckled.

"Before she met Don."

"I assumed. Let me talk to Jess while you formulate your strategy."

He left the room, barely avoiding Birgit, who scurried in.

"Are you OK, Dad?" Birgit asked, looking and sounding very concerned.

"I'm fine, Pumpkin. Grandpa Al is going to tell your mom the doctor that I'm OK."

"She said she's going to have Doctor Mary give you a complete physical!"

"I'll mark that spot on my Jessica bingo card," I chuckled. "I assumed."

"What happened?" Birgit asked. "Who was that man?"

"Someone trying to locate somebody, but not me. As for what happened, it was a combination of limited sleep, atypical meals, my body reacting to having taken a dose of propranolol yesterday, and something surprising. Don't worry about it, Pumpkin. Everything is fine and I'm not in any trouble."

"Are you sure?" she asked, her eyes narrowing.

"I promise. Now, shoo, because here come my wives."

She glared at me but left the room when Kara, Jessica, and Suzanne came in, with Suzanne shutting the door behind them.

"Who was that man?" Jessica asked.

"I can't say," I replied. "I am not in any trouble, but I cannot reveal who he is or what he said."

"I know his name, Tiger. I bet I can find out."

"Jess, seriously, you need to let it go, please."

"No. You're hiding something that caused a syncopal event. You *will* tell me."

"I simply can't," I said.

"No," Jessica said sternly, and sounding annoyed, "you *can*, but you *won't*."

"We can split whatever hairs you want, Babe, but I simply can't say. And please do not try to find out anything. This has literally nothing to do with any of you, and, under the circumstances, nothing to do with me beyond being asked to convey a message."

"To whom?"

"Jess, he's not going to say because he gave his word," Kara said. "I'm positive that's the only reason he'd remain silent. We simply have to trust him that there is no risk to him or to any of us."

"He had a syncopal event!" Jessica protested. "We need to know what caused it."

"The content of the message I was asked to convey," I replied. "That's all."

"Why you?"

"Answering that would violate the confidence," I replied. "As I said to Birgit, and to Al, it was a combination of limited sleep, atypical meals, my body reacting to having taken a dose of propranolol yesterday, and something surprising."

"You ate carbs," Jessica said flatly.

"I had limited access to food in the Admiral's Club after the flight was delayed. As I said to Al, I had an apple with my first meal of cold cuts and cheese, with a slice of whole grain bread that was around 5:00pm. Then around 9:00pm, a banana, cold cuts, cheese, and a slice of whole grain bread. No soda, no desserts,

no candy, no cookies. Only water to drink, though I didn't drink on the flight, so I might be a bit dehydrated.

"Why would you eat bread?"

"Because there were limited options," I replied. "I didn't feel manic, I slept on the plane, something I generally never do, and I followed my diet in San Francisco, along with walking quite a bit."

"Steve, are you positive there's no threat to our family?" Suzanne asked.

"There is no threat to anyone here at the Compound, nor to Elyse and her kids, nor to my sister and her family, nor to NIKA, nor to the dojo."

"He's not an irate father?" Jessica asked.

"No. I haven't really run into one of those since High School when Kara went home with wet hair!"

All three wives laughed.

"No irate fathers here about *you*, anyway," Kara observed. "Jesse, on the other hand..."

"The irate grandmother was the bigger problem," I replied. "The upset dads complained about the sauna, and there was no sex."

"That you know of!" Kara tittered.

"I trust Jesse to tell me the truth," I replied. "Though without names or details."

"Are you sure the party he and his friends are having is a good idea?" Jessica asked.

"The party? Or the sauna?"

"The sauna, obviously! Don't be difficult, Tiger!"

"Asking Steve not to be difficult is like asking Birgit to chill!" Suzanne declared.

"There might be some truth to that," I said with a grin. "In the end, it's up to Jesse. They chose not to invite any Freshmen, and according to Jesse, Luna Alonso spoke personally with each girl. I think the kids will be discreet and we need to give them the benefit of the doubt. The problem last time was one specific girl who wasn't invited who made a claim with no actual evidence that happened to be true. I think the kids will be fine."

"Did you ask Jennifer and Josie?" Kara inquired.

"Yes. And they're OK with the plans. Jesse had discussed it with them before I spoke to them, and they agree -- the kids will be discreet and we need to give them the freedom to manage their own lives. I did make it clear that nobody who isn't currently in High School could participate, because THAT is a problem we don't need, and as I said, they already excluded Freshmen."

"So Nicholas isn't invited?" Suzane asked.

"No, and Jesse spoke to him and he's cool about it. Are we OK, Jess?"

"I'm not happy, but I'm outvoted. Again."

"Jess, it's not like that," Kara countered. "It's about trusting Steve to tell us about any threats. Would you share patient information with us if we insisted? I mean names and diagnosis?"

"No, but that's...never mind. I see your point. I just don't like it because it caused Steve to have a syncopal episode."

"Steve is happy to demonstrate that he's in good health, if that interests you in any way."

Jessica laughed softly, "Of course it does, but not all of us have insane sex drives like someone in this room!"

"I make NO excuses!" Kara exclaimed. "None! But why don't you and Steve spend some time together, just the two of you? We'll all celebrate tonight, but I think you need some quality time with your Tiger."

"What do you say, Jess?" I asked.

"Come upstairs with me," she said with a smile.

 Albert

"What do we know?" Ashley asked.

She, Birgit, Stephie, and I had come up to my room after Grandpa Al said dad was OK.

"I know his name," Birgit said. "Steve Samet. We could search the internet and see if there is any information.

"Those 'people search' sites all cost money," I countered.

"Sure," Birgit agreed. "But we might find something."

"I'm not sure that's a good idea," I said. "If Dad told you to MYOB, you should."

"I think Albert is right," Stephie said.

"I agree with Birgit!" Ashley declared. "We should know who that guy is because we don't know what he might do!"

"Don't you think Dad will handle it?" I inquired. "If there was really a threat, he'd warn us. Don't you trust him to protect us?"

"Yes," Ashley admitted. "But I still think we should know what's going on. What if the guy comes back?"

"Then we get dad, or tell the guy to get lost," I said. "Birgit, please don't do anything foolish."

"Oh, please!" she protested.

"You are impetuous, Sis!" Ashley declared.

"Ain't THAT the truth!" Stephie interjected.

"HEY!" Birgit protested.

"If the shoe fits..." I said.

 Birgit

"Where's Dad?" I asked my mom when I went downstairs to the sunroom.

"With your other mom," Mom replied.

"Arguing?"

"Making up!" Mom replied with a silly smile.

"Is everything OK?"

"I think so," Mom replied.

"Do YOU know who that guy was and what he wanted?"

"No. Dad said it wasn't about anyone here or your Aunt Stephanie and her family or Elyse and her boys, but he couldn't say more."

"It's weird, Mom!"

"I agree, but I trust your dad and he says there is no danger."

"Are you *sure*?"

"Has your dad ever lied to you?"

"Well, no."

"And do you think he's ever lied to me?"

"Well, I don't know, but I don't think so."

"He hasn't," Mom said. "He's always been truthful, even about things that were difficult or uncomfortable for me or him. That was true all the way back in High School when we started dating."

"Can I ask a question?"

"Yes, and I'll answer if I can."

"When did you decide you wanted to have sex with Dad?" I asked.

Mom laughed softly, "The second he sat down next to me in Mrs. Brewer's chemistry class!"

"But you thought it was sinful, right?"

"Yes, I did, but my body had other ideas!"

I giggled, "I bet! I am your daughter, after all!"

"Yes, you are! I promise there's nothing to worry about because I trust your dad completely."

"Thanks, Mom."

"I wish you'd talk to me like this more often."

"I'll try."

 Steve

"How do you do that?" Jessica asked as we cuddled after an extremely pleasurable love-making session.

"Because I love you, Babe."

"I think you make girls feel good even if you don't love them!"

"Yes, but it's different with the ones I do; very different."

"I don't think I've been a very good wife to you."

"I disagree. First, you were clear about what you needed and wanted seventeen years ago, and I had no delusions. Second, you've given me two wonderful children who I wouldn't trade for anything in the world."

"Despite BOTH of them being aliens?" Jessica asked, interrupting me.

I chuckled, "They are quite a pair, aren't they?"

"That's one way to put it!"

"Anyway," I continued, "if you're referring to the way you respond to stress and to things you think put people at risk, I believe that was part and parcel of the bargain. I knew you were driven, and I knew your medical career would always be your primary focus. You knew it, too, which is why you said you wanted a guy who would curl your toes and look good on your arm."

"And the way I've treated you at times? And becoming estranged and needing rehab?"

"Jess, if I was under the kind of stress you are day in and day out in the ER, I'd have had a complete breakdown years ago. I honestly don't know how you do it. I have the advantage of being able to farm out most of my stress at work -- to my

sister, to Liz, and to Elyse. Sure, I get involved, but they handle the crap that always drove me nuts and stressed me out."

"But I ran away. Twice."

"And we forgave you both times. You were under a ridiculous amount of stress from work, keeping your secret, and things going on in our family. I'm not making excuses, simply acknowledging the causes, and why Kara and I completely forgave you. There's nothing wrong with our relationship from my perspective, or from Kara's or Suzanne's. They'd have said something if there were."

"And not wanting to have sex very often?" Jessica asked.

"Not to be a jerk, but it's not as if there isn't a nympho in the house!"

"Two!" Jessica smirked. "Birgit does take after her mom!"

"She does. But that's a whole different kettle of fish, as it were."

"If I hadn't put my foot down, would you have considered it?"

"It would be hard not to consider something our daughter directly requested."

"Don't be difficult now, Tiger, we're relaxed and calm."

"Sorry. I think a combination of what happened with Stephanie and what Birgit actually wanted made it impossible to consider. As I said, in a different world where Birgit was circumspect and hadn't broadcast her desire, and where she didn't want to displace you, Kara, and Suzanne, it might have happened. But that world doesn't exist, and if it did, that Birgit might never have even thought about it, let alone asked."

"Your whole bit about 'what if?' questions."

"What if I make love to you again?"

"Slow and sweet?"

"Yes."

II. Navigating A Minefield

December 24, 2002, Christmas Eve, Chicago, Illinois

 Steve

Late on Tuesday, just before dinner, I placed the call I promised to make.

"This is Steve Adams calling from Chicago. May I speak with Steven Samet?"

"Speaking."

"I spoke to my dad and I'll just tell you straight -- he declined to meet you."

I heard a deep sigh, then he said, "Did he give a reason?"

"He said, quite specifically, he *can't* know you, and cannot re-open that chapter of his life. He didn't provide any further details. I don't know any more than you do; actually, I knew less because I had no idea Lewis Hano was married."

"So you believe me."

"I do, but I also need to hold you to your promise to not try to contact him."

"So that's it? You don't want to know the full truth the same as I do?"

"Of course I do," I replied. "All I can say is 'wait'. If you're concerned about his age, don't be, as he's the healthiest person I know except for a bit of bursitis. Even at age eighty, I think he has at least a dozen years, if not more. My counsel is to wait and see what happens. That said, I'm not opposed to piecing things

together, so long as it doesn't go against my dad's wishes to not re-open that portion of his life."

"I have to say I'm disappointed."

"I understand. It's public now, but my wife had a similar hidden past, and the revelation caused no end of discord and strife. It subsided, eventually, but not without a lot of emotional pain and suffering. I'm sure you're hurting because of what he said, but if it's true he was in the CIA, and I have evidence to back that up, then he might be required by the Federal government to stay silent about his past."

"But *you* know."

"I only know because about ten years ago, the FBI asked me about his alternate names. I had no idea about 'Hano', but I did know his birth name. I asked him, and he revealed some information, which I'm sure he did to keep me from digging, which I absolutely would have done."

"Given all of that, what did you tell your wife?"

"Nothing. Not even the reason you were here. The only person who knows besides you, me, and my dad, is my father-in-law, and he won't say a word, even to his daughter. His advice was to manage the situation rather than allow it to manage us. I'm taking that advice."

"Which means?"

"We stay in touch, we share information, and we see what happens. I wish I could do more, but I'm not about to wreck my parents' marriage and potentially open a can of worms with the Feds. I've had enough trouble from them over the years, mainly due to my Russian friends before 1991."

"They were a bit touchy about things like that. I agree with your plan. Let me provide you with an email address, and we can share information. I won't put anything publicly on ancestry.com, but you know someone will eventually make the connections."

"At the moment, a risk we'll have to take," I replied. "I don't know that my dad will be amenable to yielding on his 2011 target. That said, if someone else does make the link and connects the records on ancestry.com for public view, I think that will force the issue. I'm going to create an account there. What's your email address?"

He gave it to me, I promised to email him, we said 'goodbye' and I hung up. I had spent some time before the call writing in my journal, which was encrypted, with Katya holding copies of my encryption keys and passphrase, so it was safe. I wondered how I might go about finding information about my Russian ancestors, given Tsarist records likely didn't exist, or were found in local villages in hard-copy form only.

That was a question for another day. The real question was if I could reveal anything more to my wife and children. They knew about my dad's birth name, his Naval service, and his CIA service, at least in a general way, and revealing that we had Russian ancestors only impacted the 'Tobias' persona, not the 'Hano' persona. Of course, Felipe Rodriguez knew my dad as 'Luís Hano', so he might actually know about my dad's other family, all things considered.

In the end, computerization of historical records was going to make it fairly easy for someone to piece things together, and Al's advice to manage the situation weighed more and more on me. If the situation was revealed by anyone other than my dad or me, it could cause significant problems with my wives, as they'd think I kept them in the dark while third parties had access to the information.

That would be doubly true if the name 'Samet' was linked to the 'Hano', 'Tobias', or 'Adams' personas.

There was, in my mind, only one thing to do. Trying to navigate the minefield would inevitably lead to something blowing up in my face, and I couldn't allow that to happen. I got up, went to the Indian room and asked my wives to join me in my study.

"What I'm about to say cannot be repeated to anyone, at any time, and cannot even be mentioned to me unless I mention it first," I said. "I need all three of you to agree to that, and then I'll reveal what happened this morning."

"Why could we not mention it to you?" Jessica asked.

"Because what I'm going to say can only be spoken about in extremely limited circumstances, and it has to stay that way, and it has to be me who decides. You'll understand once I tell you, but I can only tell you if you agree. Do you trust me, Jess?"

"Yes, I trust you, and I agree."

"Me, too," Kara confirmed.

"And me," Suzanne added.

"I'm confident what I'm about to say is true, but I'm not a hundred percent sure, nor do I know any more details than I'm going to share. The man who showed up this morning is Steven Marc Samet, born Steven Marc Hano, son of Lewis B. Hano, born Lewis Betram Tobias. He's my half-brother."

All three wives gasped in surprise.

"But..." Kara said. "No, go ahead, I'll wait until you finish."

"First, you'll note he and I are both eldest sons and both have the same name, albeit his is spelled with a 'v' not a 'ph', and Kara and Jess, you'll understand this -- his middle name is spelled with a 'c' not a 'k'."

"Your Social Security Card had that spelling!" Kara exclaimed. "Because your dad filled out that form!"

"Yes, though there's a bit more to it, but that's irrelevant at the moment. Anyway, Lewis B Hano, born Lewis Betram Tobias, married Marion Fitz in September 1950, about seven months after the first Steven Marc was born. Lewis Hano divorced Marion Fitz, and she remarried, taking her new husband's name -- Samet -- and changing the kids' names as well.

"Kids?!" Jessica asked. "As in, you have other half-siblings?"

"I know no details other than Steve Samet said 'siblings' when he described being estranged from his family. I don't know if they were 'Hano' kids or 'Samet' kids, or a mix. In any event, everything Steve Samet said lines up with what I know, though he obviously had additional information which I didn't have.

"When I called my dad, he said that he couldn't -- and didn't want to -- know Steve Samet, and that he was uninterested in reopening that chapter of his life. He did confirm something I've long suspected, and that is that he and his family were Jewish when he was 'Lewis Tobias' and 'Lewis Hano', and, more interestingly, my maternal grandmother's parents were Russian Jews who emigrated sometime before 1890."

"WOW!" Suzanne exclaimed. "So you're at least part Russian!"

"I think, based on being half-Jewish, I could move to Israel under the Law of Return, as could my kids, because they have a Jewish grandparent."

"Unbelievable!" Kara exclaimed. "Jess, I think his syncopal event is fully explained by what he just told us."

"I think so," Jessica replied, "but I still want Mary to give him a complete physical on Thursday."

"I told Al that after he examined me. He knows, because I needed advice. And it was his advice that led me to reveal everything to you."

Jessica took a deep breath, let it out, then said, "You could tell him, but not me?"

"He's one of my doctors, and he asked because he needed to know what caused the syncopal event. I love you, but you're not my physician, and can't be, because you're my wife. After I told Al, I decided to call my dad and see what he said, which was what I told you before. Then, after thinking about it for a few hours, I called Steve Samet to tell him what my dad had said. He's sad and disappointed, but he promised not to make anything public or try to get in touch with my dad."

"You're afraid of how your mom would react?" Jessica asked.

"You know how those kinds of revelations affect families, and it's why we won't see your mom or Troy tomorrow. Imagine my mom finding out that my dad had been married before he married her, and had kids, but didn't acknowledge them, for whatever reason."

"Not good," Jessica replied. "It might even be uglier than the situation with my mom, my dad, and Troy. How did you leave it with Mr. Samet?"

"How I'm sure you expect -- I'm far too curious to simply let this go, so I'll stay in touch with Steve Samet, we'll compare notes, but keep everything private, at least until 2011 when my dad says he can discuss more details."

"Will you tell the kids about their Russian ancestors?"

"At some point, but not before the grandparents all go home. I don't want questions asked that might make my dad suspicious that I shared this with anyone other than Al. Just to put a fine point on it, my dad said not to tell anyone, including the three of you. Al counseled wisdom, and I followed his counsel."

"I don't even know what to say about all of that," Kara said. "Will you try to meet anyone from that side of the family?"

"Not any time soon," I replied. "The last thing I want is someone making this public. Steve Samet is estranged and hasn't seen any of his family in two decades, so that might be part of why he's looking for his dad, and why he wanted to stay in touch with me."

There was a knock at the door and Suzanne got up to answer.

"Mom said to come get her when the cookies were out of the oven," Stephanie said.

"I think we're finished," I said. "Let's celebrate Christmas!"

"That's after dinner, Snuggle Bear!" Kara exclaimed as she got up from her chair.

"There's more to Christmas than sex under the tree!" Jessica exclaimed.

"TOO MUCH INFORMATION!" Stephanie exclaimed, turning and quickly moving away.

My wives and I all laughed, left my study, and went to the kitchen.



December 25, 2002, Christmas Day, Chicago, Illinois

 Steve

As was our tradition, our extended family Christmas celebration began at 1:00pm. That allowed Jesse to attend services after celebrating with his moms; Eduardo, Elyse, and her boys, plus Chelsea, to celebrate together; Joel, my sister, and her kids to celebrate together; and Natalie to celebrate with her parents. Yuriko, as she would until she returned to Japan, celebrated with my wives and the four kids who lived with us.

A new tradition, organized by Albert and Ashley, had everyone draw names for a gift exchange, so that everyone would have a gift to open, though I also bought a gift for everyone, including my sister's family. Of course, I'd had help from Birgit, Kimmy, and Jesse, who had either suggested gifts, or, in the case of Birgit for her sisters, actually picked them out.

We began, as we always did, with Jesse reading the Christmas story from Luke's Gospel. Once he finished, Ashley, Stephie, and Patty distributed the presents from under the tree. Patty, my six-year-old niece, who looked exactly like my sister had at age seven, brought me my gift, which was from my nephew Davy, her brother, who was eight, and resembled my dad more than he did Ed Krajick.

After presents, we ate a tremendous Christmas meal prepared by Yuriko, Kara, Birgit, and Josie, and had fantastic desserts prepared by my daughters and Natalie, with Ashley, as she always did, creating a special 'dad dessert' that was made with almond flour and Stevia. When it was time to clean up, Eduardo, Joel, and I handled the duties while everyone else relaxed with coffee or tea.

At 6:00pm, Terry, Penny, and their kids joined us for the evening, and we played games and had a light meal. Around 9:00pm, the entire clan had a Christmas sauna, with Stephie and Ashley wearing one-piece bathing suits, as they had been doing since they'd started developing, something which was common for teens in Sweden. Joel had overcome his discomfort with the Adams family tradition, and hadn't balked, which I was sure was a product of being married to my sister, who was every bit as sexually liberated as Kara and Birgit.

When we finished the sauna, everyone showered, which took some time, and then the gathering broke up, leaving just the inhabitants of the house. The kids went to bed, and my wives, Yuriko, and Natalie went to the Indian room to relax and listen to music until bedtime, when all of us went upstairs.

"Natalie should have her Christmas celebration," Jessica said as we were starting to undress in our room.

"You're sure, Babe?" I asked.

"We had ours last night and this morning! Go."

"Yes, Dear," I said with faux resignation, causing my wives to laugh.

I kissed each of them 'good night', then went to the door to the room Natalie and Yuriko shared, having heard them coming up. I knocked and waited for someone to open the door, which Yuriko did a few seconds later.

"Come in, Steve-sama!"

I stepped into the room.

"Natalie, Jess suggested you might like to celebrate Christmas in the traditional way."

They had a small tree on a table, which would suffice symbolically.

"We would both like to!" Natalie said. "Make love to us, then we'll both sleep in the same bed with you."

"Is that OK with you, Yuriko-chan?" I inquired.

"Yes!" she said happily, shedding her robe and displaying her beautiful body.

Natalie did the same, and I followed suit.



December 26, 2002, Boxing Day, Chicago, Illinois

 Albert

"Hi, Grandpa!" I called out when I saw him exit Commander Aimee's plane.

"Hi, Albert!"

"Jesse is here with the van so we can take you to Grandpa Al's house. I'll help Aimee with the ground check and help tie down the plane!"

"OK," Grandpa Adams said.

"Hi, Albert!" Commander Aimee called out. "I can use your help!"

"That's what I'm here for! I know the swabbie is useless with aircraft!"

"That's COMMANDER Swabbie to you, Cadet!" Commander Fitzmaurice, Aimee's husband, growled.

"Yes, Sir!" I said gruffly and snapped a smart salute.

"Adams, quit fucking around and get your ass over here double-time!" Commander Aimee ordered.

"Aye, aye, Commander!" I grinned and made a purposefully sloppy salute.

"You're in deep trouble now, Albert," Grandpa said, laughing.

"I know, Chief!" I grinned.

I helped Aimee do her landing and ground checks, then assisted in tying down the aircraft, which we'd use on Friday to take my Grandpas on a sight-seeing tour of the Loop and Lake Michigan shore. Once everything was set, we joined Grandpa, Grandma, Elizabeth, Commander Fitzmaurice, and Jesse in the van for the ride to Grandpa Al's house, where Grandpa and Grandma Adams were staying. Commander Aimee, her husband, and daughter were staying in the room off the kitchen.

"Did you receive your new orders?" I asked Commander Fitzmaurice.

"Yes. I'm assigned to the CNO's staff as an operations officer. I've completed the sea tours necessary for command, and this will complete my shore tours. Then it's XO of a surface ship, but not a carrier, despite that's how I served my sea tours."

"Any idea what they'll give you?" Grandpa asked.

"Garbage scow!" Commander Aimee teased before he could answer.

"Love you, too, Aimee!" Commander Fitzmaurice said. "I'm hoping for a destroyer or a guided missile cruiser. Everything on the new ships is computerized, and that's my area of expertise. Well, keeping them running, anyway."

"What are you doing in the CNO's office?" Grandpa asked.

"I'll be responsible for procurement and testing of electronic equipment. Not nearly as much fun as being at sea, but you have to pay your dues."

We dropped Grandma and Grandpa Adams at Grandpa Al's house so they could get settled. Grandpa Al would bring them to the house in about two hours for our Boxing Day celebration, and Fawn, Georg, and Analise would join us as well. Gerry and his family hadn't come to Chicago this year, as they were visiting his wife's family in Oregon.

 Steve

"I'm sorry to take you away from the gathering," Dad said, "but I wanted to ask if you resolved that matter from the other day. First, though, what did Mary say?"

She and Don had arrived earlier, having flown down let the night before.

"A completely clean bill of health," I replied. "As for the matter you mentioned, he said he'd let it be, and I believe he was sincere."

"Thank you. This is the last we'll mention this matter for the near future."

"Understood."

We left my study and walked to the great room just as Robert and Allison Block, Jennifer's parents, came into the house, followed almost immediately by Tom and Jill Dolan, Josie's parents. Next were Chelsea's family -- Jennie, Kent, and Colin, who I hadn't seen in some time. They were followed by Nancy Blanchard and her husband Paul, and not long after, Jake, Joyce, Joseph, and Amelia arrived, followed by Anthony, Connie, and their son Anthony, who was two. A bit later, Hope, Roger, Tabitha, John, and Danielle came into the house, and finally, Jackson, Holly, Liz, and Julius arrived.

We had a fantastic time, with the kids all enjoying time with their grandparents, who they didn't get to see very often. My mom, surprisingly, was cordial to the other grandparents, and even spent some time in what appeared to be a friendly conversation with Allison Block. I felt that was a good sign, but it was up to my mom to make the first step with my wives and me, by agreement between the four of us.

After lunch, Michael put in the videotape of the robotics competition that Eduardo had recorded, and most of the guests chose to watch the video of Michael's team winning the competition by the skin of their teeth.

"Excellent job, Michael," my dad said to him. "Is that going to be your career?"

"I think so. Computers and robots are cool."

"Andi thinks so, too!" Chelsea teased.

"Who's Andi?" my dad asked.

"A girl who has her eyes set on Michael," Elyse said. "Michael is more interested in computers and robots!"

"That'll change!" Chelsea exclaimed. "That's Andi on the team! She's cute, likes robots and computers, and is into baseball and football."

"Where were girls like that when I was young?" Robert Block asked.

"Not putting out the way I did, Bobby Block!" Allison declared, causing everyone to laugh.

"Mom!" Jennifer exclaimed. "There are children present!"

"Yes; MY child," Allison exclaimed. "And exactly where does she think she came from?"

"That was back in the dinosaur days, right?" Albert asked with a smirk.

"Listen, Bub!" Robert Block growled.

"Ignore Albert," Aimee said. "He thinks anyone older than about twenty-five is a dinosaur!"

"You said it, Commander, not me!" Albert declared.

"I'd pack a parachute for tomorrow," I said to Albert.

"You might be right," he replied.

"Well, you two were Seniors when I was in second grade," Jennie said with a silly smile. "So Albert might be onto something!"

"You went to school together?" Al asked.

"It's worse than you suspect!" Allison replied. "Fran and Sam Mercer, though she was Fran Sorkin then; Bev Thompson, who I'm sure Steve knows, because she became Bev Vaughn; Jennie, and her future husband Jim, who died in Vietnam; Alan Blanchard and Nancy Morton, Kara's parents; Carl Woody; Don Courtney. All of us were at Milford Main in the late 50s and early 60s."

"Wow!" I exclaimed. "I didn't realize you all knew each other! I bet there are some interesting stories to tell!"

"It was around 1960!" Josie said. "How interesting could they be?"

All the named people who were there laughed.

"You might be surprised," Allison Block said with a smirk. "Even without access to the Pill, teenagers were still teenagers!"

"Something true since the first human turned thirteen," I chuckled. "Nothing changes!"

"Steve, do you know a Jonathan Kane?" Jennie asked.

"I've met him a few times," I replied. "Why?"

"His mom and I are friends from back then, too. I'm sure there are other connections."

"That's when I met Kent van der Meer," Nancy said. "Alan was a member of his church."

"Someone should collect their stories and write them," Jennifer said. "I think it would be interesting. Well, so long as they leave out ANYTHING about my mom and dad having sex!"

"Oh, stop!" I chuckled. "I know you're just taking the piss, as my British friends would say!"

"What's that mean, Dad?" Ashley asked.

"Mocking, teasing, or irreverent, especially in a sarcastic way," I replied.

"So, Albert, basically all the time?" she asked with a silly smile.

"Sod off, Seppo!" Albert said in a near perfect Yorkshire accent he'd learned while visiting Jane and her family.

They'd actually be visiting for New Year's, swinging by Chicago on their way to a holiday in Florida.

"Seppo?" Connie asked.

"Cockney rhyming slang," I replied. "It means Yankee. Yank, septic tank, Seppo."

"How rude!"

I chuckled, "I believe that's the point!"

Most everyone stayed until about 10:00pm, but we didn't have a group sauna, as there were quite a few people who would not have appreciated it. That didn't stop our family from using it before bed, though, and afterwards, my wives and I made love before falling asleep.



December 27, 2002, Chicago, Illinois

 Steve

"Well, shit," I said, looking at my calendar on Friday morning.

"What's wrong?" Jessica asked.

"I forgot that Audrey and Brad will be here late this afternoon. I need to reschedule with Nadia again."

"Bummer!" Kara exclaimed.

I chuckled, "You'll have to get your cheap thrills elsewhere! Let me see if she's online."

She wasn't, so I dialed her phone number and reached an answering machine. I let her know that something had come up, and that I was very sorry, but I'd need to reschedule. I asked her to call when she had a chance and we'd find a new day to meet.

"How upset do you think she'll be?" Suzanne asked.

"I don't know," I replied. "And, honestly, that's less of a concern because the feeling I get is this is purely about sex, with no relationship and no bonding."

"Something you've begun to avoid," Jessica observed. "It's why you've turned down the medical students who are looking to bang the hot husband of an Attending for stress relief!"

"There's also our rule about the hospital," I replied. "And that is important."

"You did consider Jessica's offer of a waiver for Allyson," Kara said. "To repay the favor she did for Jessica!"

I chuckled, "I did, and she is cute, though a bit out of my preferred age range!"

"SHE'S YOUNGER THAN ME!" Jessica growled.

"But not me!" Suzanne smirked.

"He loves you, Jess, and you know it!" Kara declared. "And you even had some private time with him the other day. I'm willing to bet he didn't think you were too old then!"

"I'm teasing, of course," Jessica said. "We know Tiger's sweet spot. I will make an exception if you want one, Tiger."

"Assuming Allyson was serious about the favor, and assuming it won't cause problems at work, invite her over in January and we'll see if we click."

"That's more important for you now that it was before," Suzanne observed. "Not that you didn't do it in the past, but ever since Emilee Krueger, you've focused on the mindfuck."

"True," I agreed, "though there have been some exceptions. That said, the mindfuck is most important."

"It sounds as if your thinking has shifted somewhat," Kara interjected.

I nodded, "It has, but only in the sense of gaining clarity. I think, after the Spring Break trip, if it happens, there will be fewer new girls; in fact, I suspect new girls will be a rare exception."

"Is this some kind of reaction to what happened on Christmas Eve?" Suzanne asked.

I shook my head, "No. but the whole 'referral' bit starting up again bothers me. This isn't directed at any of you, and it's not about Allyson, or even Keiki."

"Nadia," Kara suggested.

I nodded, "I think that's the thing that helped clarify. Granted, I don't know her, which is actually part of the problem, but I get the impression that I'd simply be playing a part in a performance, and that just feels wrong. I think, in the end, my answer to her is 'no', and I'll seek out potential subversives as I always have, but after Spring Break, new girls will be few and far between."

"I notice you keep saying 'after Spring break'," Suzanne observed with a smirk.

"So sue me," I chuckled. "Only a complete idiot would pass that up!"

 Albert

"Your aircraft," Commander Aimee said once we climbed into our seats.

"My aircraft," I confirmed.

"Take us out over the lake, then along the lakefront, as far south as Gary and as far north as Milwaukee. I'll only take over if you ask me to or there's an emergency."

"Albert flying IS an emergency," Grandpa Al teased.

"He's a natural," Commander Aimee said. "Smooth, calm, cool, and collected. If he can get jets, he'll end up at Top Gun."

"If he does a low pass by the tower, they'll put him in the brig!" Grandpa Adams said.

"Nah, he's only interested in a low pass over his Yorkie!" Grandpa Al said.

"When will you see her?" Commander Aimee asked.

"On Tuesday," I replied. "They're in Chicago for New Year's, then going to Florida. Excuse me, I need to get us on our way."

I triggered the radio, requested taxi clearance, which I received. I followed the procedures, released the brakes, and taxied to the end of the runway. I stopped, asked for clearance, and was told to hold for traffic, then a minute later was cleared to take off. I brought the engine up to speed, checked all the gauges and controls, and seeing everything was set or reading correctly, I released the brakes.

"Rolling," I said.

I followed the usual takeoff procedure, and the plane lifted into the air.

"Very smooth," Aimee said as the plane climbed away from Meigs Field. "Good enough to pass your licensing exam."

"Thank you."

I switched on the new GPS unit Aimee had installed, but only used it as a check on my navigation by landmarks and compass. We flew the route Aimee had filed, as I couldn't file my own flight plan, taking us as far south as Gary and as far north as Milwaukee, before we returned to Meigs and I received landing clearance.

"Excellent landing!" Aimee said when we touched down. "Easy pass."

I taxied to the ramp, found our slot, and stopped the aircraft. We performed our final checks, tied the plane down, then headed back to the house.

 Jesse

"Hi!" Scarlett exclaimed when she walked out of the secure area at Midway early on Friday afternoon.

"Hi!" I said, as we exchanged a quick hug. "Did you check a bag?"

"No. I'm going home on Tuesday, and we're just hanging out, so I could fit what I needed in my carry-on."

I took her bag, slung it over my left shoulder, then took her hand, and we left the terminal to head to the parking garage.

"I never asked, but what's the scoop with the party tomorrow?" Scarlett inquired.

"It's guys from the hockey team and girls from the softball team. Dad gave us the run of the main house, and everyone will be out except Yuriko, who won't bother us. My moms will be around, but won't bother us, either. We'll dance, play games, and do the usual party stuff, plus a sauna."

"Everyone wearing bathing suits, though, right?"

"No. Naked."

"How many people?" Scarlett asked.

"Thirty. We didn't invite any Freshmen, which eliminated about a quarter of both teams, and didn't invite anyone we felt was either prudish or who might publicize."

"And you expect me to be naked in front of all your High School hockey buddies?"

"Expect? No. You're invited, of course, but nobody is required to participate."

"And a bunch of High School girls are going to be naked in front of a bunch of guys, just like that?"

"Just like that," I replied.

"Is there *anything* about your life that isn't crazy?" Scarlett asked, sounding slightly frustrated.

"No. Honestly, it's up to you, and I won't be upset or bothered either way."

"But you want me to."

"I want you to do what you feel comfortable doing," I replied. "If you don't want to, that's fine. I'm comfortable doing it, it's something I've done before, and being naked in the sauna is normal for all of us."

"And that's something you'll do with your family?"

"You mean when I eventually get married? Probably. I don't agree with my dad on everything, but mostly he has the right attitude and approach."

"OK to ask where you disagree?"

"I want to marry one person, have kids, and be together as a couple for life. That didn't work for Dad, which is how he ended up in his current situation."

"What do you mean when you say it didn't work?"

"I obviously don't know all the details, but Mom One has said that the only time my dad's life was stable was when there was a trio of girls fulfilling different roles. It wasn't about sex, though he mostly had sex with them, but not always, because for a time, his sister filled the 'confidante' role. I also know Aunt Kara has her own needs, and the two of them found Aunt Jess, and, as Mom One predicted, they finally found Suzanne as the permanent third."

"And the girlfriends?"

"It's more complicated than that," I said. "Dad's relationships are complex, and sex is only part of it, and not the most important part. I explained about our Hangouts and Dad's Philosophy Club. The way dad bonds with people emotionally and spiritually nearly always leads to sex, but it's a symbol of the bond, not the bond, if that makes sense."

"And you?"

I chuckled, "A red-blooded American teenager! I like sex and don't see the point in forming a permanent relationship until I'm ready to settle down, which is likely four or five years from now. People change so much in High School and college that you can't really know them until around age twenty-two, or even a bit older after they've started working."

"I know that might sound like an excuse, but it's true. According to Mom One, Dad basically had a major reset the Summer before his Senior year at IIT. His friend Karin -- a girlfriend at that time -- pointed out that their relationship was a teenage fantasy, and that actually prevented them from having an adult

relationship. They were still close, but had grown apart. She forced a reset, and that helped Dad finally clarify things.

"And as much as I loved Francesca, I think that's where we were headed as well. I've changed a lot in the past two years, and will change more in the next six. Sure, people never stop changing, but High School and college are when you figure out who you are and set the course for your life. that's the fundamental reason for not wanting a committed relationship at the moment."

"And it lets you get laid as much as you want with no limits."

"Except there are limits," I countered. "And I'm learning about relationships and doing my best to discover what I need in a life partner. Girls do the same thing, and depending on their views, sex can be part of it or not. Be honest, please -- do you know exactly what you want from your life partner?"

"If I say 'you', you'll be upset."

"No, I won't be upset, I'll simply say that I'm not ready to make that kind of commitment. I like you a lot, but I'm also only sixteen. I'll be seventeen in February, and I have one more year of High School after this one, then four years of college. I won't be the same person when I graduate from UW Madison that I am now, and you won't be the same person when you graduate in two-and-a-half years.

"For you, the changes might be more subtle or less extreme, because you're twenty, but they could also be huge. Mom One didn't come out as lesbian until she was twenty, which is a pretty huge change, and didn't decide not to marry my dad until she was twenty-one, which was pretty earth-shattering for him."

"He expected a lesbian to marry him?!"

"Remember, they were boyfriend and girlfriend and planned a future together, and they made me *after* Mom One came out. High School and college were mostly a mess for Mom One until she met Mom Two at Stanford. I know that seems like an extreme case, but my point is, people change. And yes, they change all the time, but as I said before, High School and college are the most volatile times."

We reached the car, I put Scarlett's bag in the back seat, we got in, and I started the car.

"What you say makes sense," Scarlett said as I backed out of the parking spot. "But I can't change how I feel."

"And I'm not asking you to," I replied. "I'm simply saying what's possible."

"I know. I plan to get my Master's at UW Madison, which would be when you start your Sophomore year. They have a great program and that would give us a chance to be together more."

"And there's a strong probability that plan will work, at least in terms of seeing each other more. What happens beyond that, nobody can predict."

I stopped to pay the parking fee, then pulled out onto Cicero Avenue.

"Please don't take this the wrong way," Scarlett said, "but I suppose it's my fault for falling for a guy in High School who is chronologically three years younger, but acts more like someone who is even older than I am."

"Do you regret what happened during hockey camp?"

"No! It was exactly what I wanted and needed. It's just...I fell in love with you. You don't feel the same way, do you?"

"I think the only thing I can say is that I really like you, want to keep seeing you, and believe what you want is *possible*, but I don't want you to misunderstand me. It's also the case that love is more complex than most people think. I don't remember discussing it with you, but in Greek, there are six main words for 'love' and they all have different nuances. Saying 'I love you' often has very different meanings for people, even if they don't realize it. It's all based on using a single word to convey different types of love. That's why I'm not saying it -- I don't want you to misunderstand."

"I don't. I think I know what you mean and how you feel. I also think all I can do is what I'm doing, and hope for the best."

That's all any of us can ever do," I confirmed.

III. Elements of a Contract

December 27, 2002, Chicago, Illinois

 Birgit

"Ugh!" I groused at seeing the arrival board. "Delayed!"

"That's not uncommon," Natalie, who had driven me to O'Hare on Friday afternoon in Dad's BMW, observed.

"No, but I checked the SAS website AND called to make sure it was on time! They said it was, and that was only an hour ago!"

"I hate to break it to you, but the universe does not bend to the will of the self-styled Her Royal Highness, Birgit the First of Kenwood!"

"Well, it should!" I declared.

"According to you and every *other* teenage girl on the planet! But given you all don't agree who should control the universe, we get chaos!"

"Loki is a dick!" I growled.

Natalie laughed, "You and your dad love him, even when you complain about him, because he makes your lives interesting!"

"Maybe," I allowed. "I wish they'd put on the board how long the delay is going to be."

"Patience, Grasshopper!" Natalie replied. "You do need to learn to relax."

"Don't you ever get impatient?"

"I used to, but not since I met your dad. Of course, you're just as impatient with him as with anything else that doesn't go the way you want!"

"WHAT-EVER!"

"May I say one more thing?" Natalie asked.

"What?"

"Instant gratification isn't always a good thing, even though you think it is. Toddlers demand instant gratification; mature adults do not."

"HEY!" I protested.

"If the shoe fits..." Natalie said with a smile. "And you know what?"

"What?"

"You know I'm right."

I scowled at her because she *was* right, I just didn't want to admit it. I took a couple of breaths and let them out slowly, then decided to ask her about something she'd said.

"What did you mean about meeting my dad?"

"That's when I became an adult," Natalie said. "And wipe that smirk off your face, young lady, because it wasn't about that!"

I giggled, "It's *always* about that with Dad!"

"If you're not teasing or joking, you're wrong. Yes, of course, that happened, but it happened *after* he taught me how to think and act like an adult by treating me as an adult. And, despite your impetuosity, he treats *you* as an adult, with all the privileges and responsibilities that come with that. But that doesn't mean you aren't still a teenager who has limited life experience, whose body is changing every day, and who is on hormone overload!

"Remember, every other teenager is in the same situation, but your dad gives you the freedom to explore and experiment that I never had. I was still being treated like a pre-teen when I met your dad in Russia. All he did was treat me the way he treats you, Jesse, and your siblings. Yes, that led to going to bed together, but that was a symbol of what had already happened."

"You think I'm a little kid?" I asked.

Natalie smiled, "You're a teenager! It's a transition time, and you're fortunate that your dad is fully behind the transition, as opposed to how some parents you know behave."

"You're interfering with a good snit!" I protested.

Natalie laughed, "I bet you say that to your dad at times."

"Maybe," I replied, but my tone clearly implied 'yes'.

"May I point out something which might upset you?"

"Could I stop you?" I asked.

Natalie smiled, "Yes; I'm not Jesse!"

I laughed, "I love him anyway."

"I know. What I'm going to point out is that your trouble with boys is that you're impetuous. If you were a boy, I'd say you were thinking with the wrong head. But thinking with your clit it just as bad as thinking with your glans."

"You think I do that?"

"Be honest, Birgit."

"Maybe I do sometimes."

"Yes, and that's what has led to your difficulties with boys. Consider what you want, besides orgasms, before you take a boy into your bed. I'm not judging, and if you want to celebrate your fifteenth birthday by fucking the entire Kenwood Academy basketball team, that's your prerogative. If, on the other hand, you want a relationship, you have to work at that. That's what your dad does, even for the girls who come to him for an 'expert deflowering' as your coupons offered. Think about the girls you know about and his relationship with them."

"They're all close friends or treat Dad as a mentor, or both. That's you, right?"

"I also love him," Natalie said. "He provides everything I need at this stage in life. What he can't provide is what I want in the future -- a husband and a family. But I'm not ready for either of those. And when I am, then your dad will be a mentor and intimate friend, but not intimate the way society thinks."

"Society has its head up its butt!"

"It does. I'm curious, if you could change just one thing, what would it be?"

That Dad had given ME an expert deflowering! But I couldn't say that to Natalie.

"That everyone would mind their own business!" I declared.

"You are your father's daughter! That would be his answer as well."

The board switched to 'LANDED' but that meant they still had to taxi and Kjell had to clear immigration and customs.

 Steve

My mobile phone rang just before 4:00pm, and thinking it was Nadia, I slipped it from my pocket. The displayed number wasn't one I recognized, and was in the city, not the suburbs.

"Steve Adams."

"Hi! It's Libby! You said we could get together during Christmas Break so an enthusiastic teenage girl could wildly fuck you!"

I chuckled, "I did say that."

"What are you doing right now?" Libby asked invitingly.

"Waiting on some friends from Ohio to arrive, which they should at any moment."

"Bummer. I'm busy tomorrow, but what about Sunday?"

"I'm free on Sunday," I replied. "What did you have in mind?"

Libby laughed softly, "I think you know!"

"I meant the time!"

"Oh," she replied flatly, causing me to laugh.

"Nice. You seem to have adopted the Adams/Block sarcastic style!"

"How could I not hanging around Jesse, Mom One, and Mom Two?!"

"Good point!" I chuckled.

"How about 11:00am on Sunday?" Libby suggested. "My parents will be gone all day, so we can use my room and keep it private from someone you call the Neighborhood Watch!"

"You're positive your parents won't come home?" I asked.

"They're in Colorado, and their flight gets in late on Sunday."

"Then I'll see you Sunday at your house at 11:00am."

"Prepare to have your mind blown!" Libby declared.

We said 'goodbye', I closed my phone and went to the Indian room to let my wives know.

"She's seventeen, right?" Kara asked.

"Yes. And Jesse knew she was going to ask. She also plans to start attending Philosophy Club in January. She said it was time to graduate, so to speak -- her first fuck with an actual adult, then attending Philosophy Club."

"She's a Junior, right?"

"Yes, though she plans to go to Harvard for pre-law."

"So when Liz is ready to retire, Libby will be your new *Consigliere*?" Kara asked.

"Nobody knows what the future will hold!"

The doorbell rang, and I left the Indian room and went to answer it. When I opened the door, I saw Audrey, a guy, and a young woman of college age.

"Hi!" Audrey exclaimed. "This is Brad, my boyfriend."

"Hi!" I replied, accepted a hug from her and shook hands with Brad. "Welcome!"

"And this is my friend, Isabella. She drove us here, and I hope you don't mind if she hangs out with us."

"«¡Mi casa es tu casa!»" I replied. ("My house is your house!")

"«¿Hablas español?»" Isabella asked. ("You speak Spanish?")

"«Sí, pero no con fluidez.»" ("Yes, but not fluent.")

She smiled, I invited them in, and we went to the Indian room to introduce Brad and Isabella to my wives who already knew Audrey.

"How is Darla?" Kara asked Audrey.

"Still loving Germany and loving being a mom! Mark is six months old and a handful! I visited in August before school started. She just started practicing karate again."

"Let me take them downstairs and get them set in the guest room," I said.

I showed Audrey and Brad to the right-hand guest room, with Isabella tagging along.

"Cool house," she observed.

"You haven't seen anything yet!" Audrey declared. "Steve, can we give Brad and Isabella a complete tour?"

"Of course! Before I forget, I'll be busy all day tomorrow."

"No problem! Brad has never been to Chicago and Isabella is taking us sightseeing. Would it be OK if she came to the New Year's Eve party? She's twenty-one."

"She's welcome, of course. And she can bring a date, if she'd like."

"Thanks," Isabella said.

"Shall we take the tour?"

 Birgit

Kjell, Natalie and I finally arrived at the house just after 4:00pm, more than an hour later than we should have. I saw Dad coming down the stairs with Audrey, who was Darla's sister, and two people I didn't know.

"«Hejsan!»" Dad said to Kjell.

"«Hej, Steve!»" Kjell replied.

"Birgit, you know Audrey," Dad said. "This is her boyfriend Brad and her friend Isabella. Brad, Isabella, meet my daughter Birgit and her friend Kjell from Sweden."

They all greeted each other.

"We're going to put his bags in my room," I said. "What time is dinner?"

"6:00pm," Dad replied. "We ordered Chinese."

"OK."

I led Kjell up to my room and shut the door. We spoke Swedish together, as was normal for us.

"I emptied the top drawer in the dresser for you, and there's room in the closet for you to hang anything, and you can put your toothbrush and stuff in the bathroom."

"I should call home and let them know I arrived safely."

"OK. Use the landline phone on my desk. Dial 0-1-1 then 46, then 8, then your number."

He followed my instructions, spoke to his mom, and then replaced the handset.

"All good?" I asked.

"Yes. Mom said to say 'hi' to your dad. Let me unpack and we can go downstairs."

"What time did you want to go to bed?" I asked. "I know it's like 11:00pm by you."

"I think around 9:00pm," Kjell said. "That's about 3:00am by me, but that way I switch my clock quicker."

"Will you be too tired to fool around?" I asked.

"You're kidding, right?"

I giggled, "That's what I thought!"

 Steve

"Is everything Audrey told me about your relationships true?" Isabella asked as we reached the bottom of the stairs.

"I suspect so," I replied. "Would you like to meet my wives and girlfriends?"

"Weird, but yes!"

"It's only just begun to get weird!" Audrey exclaimed. "If you hang out here very long, you'll have your mind blown."

"We're having an impromptu Philosophy Club meeting on New Year's Eve afternoon," I said.

"Awesome!" Audrey exclaimed. "What time?"

"1:00pm," I replied. "We'll finish around 4:00pm so we can set up for the New Year's Eve party."

"What's 'Philosophy Club'?" Isabella asked.

"Audrey didn't tell you?" I asked.

"I only told her about your relationships so we could get past that surprise," Audrey replied. "Everything else she has to discover for herself."

"And Brad?"

"Same," Audrey smirked. "That's what my sister did to me, minus telling me about your relationships! Sauna after dinner?"

"You, Etheldred," I chuckled, "are a troublemaker!"

"What did I miss?" Brad asked.

"Our saunas are usually used naked," I replied. "Co-ed."

"In your dreams!" Isabella exclaimed.

"Birgit," I called out as she and Kjell came down the stairs. "Got a sec?"

She came over to us.

"Birgit, tell my friends how we use the sauna here."

"Naked, of course!" she declared.

"Why do I think I walked into an episode of the *Twilight Zone*?" Brad asked.

I chuckled, "Because you did! Come meet my wives and girlfriends, and we'll take it from there."

[Cincinnati, Ohio]

 Matthew

"What are you guys doing while you're here?" Aunt Jennie asked after we sat down for dinner at her house on Friday evening.

"We're going to the Art Museum with Pavel, Larisa, Rachel, Abi, and Viktoria. They're also bringing a girl named April and her boyfriend Mark, and another girl named Jordan."

"Are they from the same church as everyone else?" Aunt Jennie asked.

"Yes, though Abi doesn't go to church. She's Rachel's best friend because her mom and grandma are close friends with Rachel's dad."

"That's the doctor, right?" I asked.

"Yes," Chelsea replied. "And I don't think they mentioned it last time, but Viktoria is Rachel's cousin, though, by her biological mom, not her current mom. And Hope is Rachel's cousin because her mom was adopted by Rachel's dad's parents."

"I need a scorecard!" Kent declared.

"You seem to handle my family without a scorecard!" I said.

Kent laughed, "I've had time! Your dad walked Jennie down the aisle when he was a teenager!"

"That was when he met Mom, right?" I asked.

"Yes. He brought Jesse's mom as his date, and that's when I had the first clue about your family, thought I didn't realize it at the time!"

"Blame the Reds," Aunt Jennie said. "They were on TV and I mentioned to your mom that your dad was watching the game. She went to see him, and the rest is, as they say, history!"

"When are you heading home?" Kent asked.

"On Tuesday morning," Chelsea replied. "We're going to a New Year's party at a friend's house in Oswego."

When we finished dinner, Chelsea and I offered to clean up, then spent the evening with her parents.



December 28, 2002, Chicago, Illinois

 Steve

On Saturday morning, I left the house early, and headed to the Gold Coast, arriving at the building where Ken Thompson had his condo just before 7:00am. I pulled up in front of the building, and a liveried doorman came to the car. I lowered the passenger window, and he bent down.

"Are you here for Miss Thompson?" he asked.

"Yes."

He stood, waved, and Emma came out of the building. He opened the door for her, she got in, buckled in, and he shut the door.

"Have a nice day, Miss Thompson!"

"Thanks, Bob!" she replied.

She closed the window, and I pulled away from the curb.

"Sorry about not greeting you with a kiss, but I don't want to be public given I'm sixteen and you're thirty-nine."

"A wise choice. Breakfast?"

"Yes."

"We'll head for Bucktown Bistro for breakfast, and then, if you're still interested in making the beast with two backs, to the apartment I mentioned."

"You think I might have changed my mind? And that I wouldn't have called to tell you?"

"Do you remember what I said about that particular commitment?"

"That it was never irrevocable. But most guys would be pissed."

"I suspect you know my response."

"That you're not like most guys!"

"Correct. And you agree, otherwise you wouldn't have sat down next to me in San Francisco, continued the conversation, asked to sit next to me, and invited me to make the beast with two backs!"

"Perhaps that's my typical behavior."

"Perhaps it is," I replied. "That doesn't change my observation that you don't think I'm like most guys. You specifically said boys your age were complete idiots; you also said your mom wouldn't understand you having an older, *steady* boyfriend, implying you might have gone out with an older guy."

"And if I have?"

"It's only relevant if you believe it's relevant, and, to be clear, not any of my business one way or the other."

"You're not interested in knowing my history?"

"Of course I'm interested, but what you choose to share is up to you. Ultimately, it's a question of what you want out of our relationship."

"It takes two to Tango," Emma countered. "Don't we have to have what's called a 'meeting of the minds'?"

I chuckled, "Spoken like a lawyer's kid!"

"I *am* a lawyer's kid! A meeting of the minds, mutual consideration, an offer, and acceptance!"

"Those are the elements of a contract!"

"I'm curious why you think it's one-sided."

"I don't, actually. I know what I want from the relationship, but I don't know what you want, beyond your statement that you want to make the beast with two backs multiple times before you fly home next week."

"What DO you want besides sleeping with an underage girl?"

"You keep using that word..." I said lightly.

"And it *does* mean what I think it means! I'd like to hear your answer."

"I am always on the lookout for people who are open-minded, counter-cultural, and who think the country is on the wrong track. I bond with them, build a relationship, and mentor them. That's the most important part, and we can actually do that without sleeping together."

"And you'd be OK with that?"

"Yes."

"But you're expecting to have sex with me."

"Anticipating, but not expecting, It's a subtle difference, but an important one."

"Because I could change my mind."

"Yes. And that would not upset me in any way, shape, or form."

"Would you be disappointed?"

"Yes, but not in a way that held it against you. What I'm looking for is another member of my subversive cadre. The structure of the relationship depends on

you, your needs, and what you want to achieve, both short and long term. That could be anything from a close, ongoing relationship to a 'catch and release' situation."

"What do you mean by that?"

"It means some of the subversives I recruit choose a path that doesn't involve regular interaction; others choose to be my personal karate students; others I see occasionally because they live some distance away. The question is, what do you want? I mean, besides the obvious."

"I actually thought about some things you said, and I'm considering attending college in Chicago to study computers. I mentioned it to my dad, and he thinks computers would be a good choice, and he wouldn't object to me being around more. At least I'd get to see him regularly, unlike my mom, who is pretty much always working."

"Did you mention you met me?" I asked.

"Yes, and he said your company is very forward thinking and has an excellent reputation."

"We are a pure meritocracy and take very good care of our staff. Does your dad know you're seeing me today?"

"No. I told him I was going to have breakfast with a friend and hang out with them. He doesn't pry, so there won't be any problems."

"OK. I should probably ask what you like to eat so we can plan lunch and dinner."

"Anything is OK. Chinese, pizza, or whatever are all good. You have dietary restrictions, right?"

"Yes. Chinese for dinner, then. For lunch, Potbelly's is close and they have soup and salads, in addition to sandwiches."

"That's cool. What's your favorite thing to eat?"

I smirked, "A leading question if there ever was one!"

Emma laughed, "Pussy?"

"Tastes great and less filling!"

"Isn't filling it the point?"

"Eventually, but I did promise to do that until you could no longer stand it."

We arrived at Bucktown Bistro and were seated by the morning hostess, and Pam came over to our table.

"I didn't expect to see you until after New Year's," she said. "Earl Grey?"

"Yes, please."

"And you, Miss?"

"OJ, please."

Pam left to get our drinks.

"You must come here often," Emma observed.

"A men's group meets on alternate Saturdays. We've been meeting longer than you've been alive, though we started at Lou Mitchell's on Jackson."

"You've made that point several times."

"Just as you've made the 'underage' point several times."

"When did you actually first meet?"

"May 1986," I replied. "So about five months before you were born, if your birthday was in October, which you implied with the timing of your OB/GYN exam."

"October 22nd. When's yours?"

"April 22nd, so exactly six months offset, though 1963 instead of 1986."

Pam brought our drinks and asked Emma if she was ready to order, which she was. Once Pam had taken Emma's order, she left the table.

"You're not going to have anything other than tea?" Emma asked.

"Pam will bring my breakfast," I replied. "I've eaten the same thing every time I've been here since we first came here in July 1987. Pam knows my order, and those of the regulars in our group of around thirty guys. Only new people or irregular attendees actually have to order. Actually, I do need to correct myself -- I swapped the potatoes for fruit when the docs determined my susceptibility to syncopal events when I ate complex carbohydrates."

"You never change?"

"No. I do come here for dinner, and then I have a varied menu, usually something Alex Saunders whips up for my party."

"I guess after sixteen years, you'd know the chef!"

"Yes."

"OK to change topics?"

"Sure."

"When do you teach karate?"

"I have a regular class for my personal students on Saturday afternoon and sometimes teach the daily classes at the dojo. We don't hold classes during the week between Christmas and New Year's."

"You have other instructors under you?"

"I don't run the dojo," I replied. "I'm the most senior instructor, though."

"But you have your own students?"

"Yes. I have my own specialized teaching system that is more challenging than simple physical fitness. It's also spiritual and intellectual."

"Separate from the philosophy discussions you mentioned?"

"Yes. If you're interested in a sample, we're having an impromptu meeting on Tuesday. And if you aren't doing anything for New Year's, you're welcome to come to our New Year's Eve party. You'd have a chance to meet my wives and kids."

"Do your kids know about your lifestyle?"

"I have three wives and two girlfriends who live in the house, plus I have kids with four women. What do YOU think?"

Emma laughed, "Good point!"  Birgit

"Are you OK hanging out with Albert, Nicholas, Peter, and Julie today?" I asked Kjell as we snuggled in bed when we woke up on Saturday morning.

"Sure. What are we going to do?"

"Lunch at Giordano's, the Museum of Science and Industry, Chinese for dinner, then see *Catch Me if You Can*, a thriller about the FBI chasing a guy who pretended to be a Pan Am pilot, a doctor, and conned people out of millions. It's based on a true story."

"That sounds good. Jesse and Scarlett aren't coming?"

"No. He's having a party for his hockey team and the girls' softball team. Matthew is in Ohio with Chelsea, and my sisters are having their own thing at Amber's house next door, but it's girls only. And Michael is hanging out with his friend Andi, her dad, and Eduardo. Tomorrow we're hanging out with Jesse and Scarlett and some of his friends."

"Cool."

"Do you want breakfast?"

"I'm famished! Someone wore me out last night, and I was already tired!"

I giggled, "I promise to wear you out every night!"

"I won't object!"

We got out of bed, showered, dressed, and went downstairs to have breakfast.

[Cincinnati, Ohio]

 Matthew

"Can someone explain the complicated relationships?" I asked as we walked from the parking garage to the art museum.

"Jordan's mom is my dad's sister," Rachel said. "Viktoria's dad and my biological mom were brother and sister. My mom died the day I was born, and my dad remarried. April's mom was adopted by my paternal grandparents when she was fourteen. Abi has been my best friend since I was born, and her mom and grandma are close friends of my dad, and her grandma taught my dad to play guitar. Larisa's mom is a girl my dad has known his whole life and her dad was a deacon; they actually dated for a short time. Pavel's dad is the priest of his church. Mark goes to the same church as April and Larisa."

"Your mom really died the day you were born?" I asked.

"Yes. She had a congenital defect of blood vessels in her brain, and according to the doctors, there was no way to detect it or fix it if they could detect it. Well, now we could detect it with an MRI, but still not fix it."

"So your siblings are from your stepmom?"

"Just my mom. I never knew my biological mom, so I never thought of my mom as anything other than my mom. They told me about it when I was five, though I

didn't really understand until I was older. But it's more complicated because I have a half-brother who's the son of a doctor friend of my dad's."

"Why does this sound like my family?" I asked with a goofy smile.

Rachel laughed, "I've heard! But it's not quite like that. My brother Alexi's mom is lesbian, though they conceived artificially. And he doesn't call his mom's partner 'mom', he calls her 'Aunt Tessa'."

"Your family is almost as complicated as mine," I replied.

"And it gets MORE complicated," Rachel declared, "because my paternal grandpa remarried a much younger woman, and I have an uncle who is only six months older than I am!"

"My mom had just turned fifteen when I was born," April interjected. "I never met my dad because he got twenty-five years for having sex with my mom when she was fourteen and he was forty."

"Did you want to meet him?" Chelsea asked.

"Not really, and even if I did, he's not allowed to have visitors under eighteen."

"Did your mom get married?"

"Yes, right after she graduated from college. I like my stepdad a lot."

"I don't know if anyone told you, but my mom lives with her boyfriend," I said.

"How long have they been together?" Rachel asked.

"They actually dated in college, but then he went back to Spain. When he moved to the US, they got together again."

"My mom's husband isn't my dad," Larisa said. "My biological dad is a complete fanatic."

"I don't think anyone except Pavel and Jordan has a traditional family," Chelsea said. "Mark's parents are divorced and remarried."

"You do," I said. "I mean, sure, your mom was married to the soldier who died in Vietnam, but your mom and dad were married when you were born and are still married."

"True."

"And honestly," I said, "what truly matters is we all have parents who care for us."

[Chicago, Illinois]

 Steve

"You know," I said as we walked through the door of the NIKA apartment, "you never did tell me your superpower."

"You're right, I didn't!" Emma replied. "And I said I didn't reveal it to just anyone!"

"I'm not 'just anyone!'"

"You never told me yours, either!" Emma countered. "But I suspect you're about to show me."

I smiled, took her hand, and led her to the second bedroom, which was right across from the bathroom.

"I suppose it's time for a proper kiss," Emma said with a smile.

I held out my arms, and she melted into them, her firm body pressed against mine. Our lips touched, then parted, and our tongues began a gentle dance. Remembering what Emma had said, I moved my hands to cup her butt and gave it a squeeze, and Emma broke the kiss.

"Told ya' you could find it!" she declared.

"Any requests?"

"Make me feel really, really good!"

"I can do that! I hate to be crass, but STI test?"

Emma smiled, "Fortunately my gynecologist's office was open yesterday and could fax it to me."

She handed it to me and I handed it back, then, as was my practice, I showed her my card.

"What would have happened if I couldn't get it?" she asked.

"I trust you, but I'd have had to say 'no'. I'm glad it worked out!"

"Me, too! Now, make me feel good!"

Three minutes later we were both naked, and I took in her gorgeous, lithe body -- small, firm breasts capped with light brown nipples, a flat stomach, graceful legs,

a smoothly shaved mons, and plump labia, already slick with her juices. I pulled down the comforter, then took Emma's hand and led her to the bed. She got in, turned on her side, and I go in next to her, lying on my side facing her.

We French kissed for a bit, then I gently pushed Emma onto her back and lowered my mouth to her breast. I spent about five minutes on her breasts before I kissed my way down to her bare mons, breathing deeply and taking in her wonderful scent. I planted several kisses on the inside of Emma's thighs, then several more along her plump labia. After those kisses, I pressed my tongue into her, coating it with her spicy juices.

Emma moaned softly as I swirled my tongue and breathed in sharply when I ran it over her clit. I closed my mouth and sucked hard, causing Emma to groan, and she began slowly rolling her hips as I pleased her to her first orgasm. Knowing we had all day, and I could keep my promise of hours of oral sex later, I moved up, grasped my shaft, rubbed my glans along Emma's slick labia, then slowly entered her. She was so wet that I had no problem sliding in until my pubic hair was pressed against her mons.

I bent down, we exchanged a French kiss, and I began fucking her with slow gentle thrusts. Emma wrapped her arms and legs around me and we began moving in sync. About every five strokes I ground against her for several seconds before resuming our movements. About four minutes after we started, Emma shuddered and moaned into my mouth as her pussy spasmed around my dick as she had her first of four orgasms.

Her fourth one was the strongest and brought me to the point of no return. I pushed deep into her tight, spasming tunnel, groaned and fired jet after jet of cum into her. When my orgasm had run its course, I withdrew, slid down, and used my tongue to bring her to her sixth orgasm of the day. My goal achieved, I moved up and Emma and I exchanged a fierce French kiss.

"My turn," she said, breathing hard.

She gently nudged me to my back and then, following the pattern I'd used earlier, sucked on both my nipples, then kissed her way down to my groin. She grasped my semi-flaccid shaft, licked it clean, then took my glans into her mouth, sucking and swirling her tongue. It didn't take long before I was erect, at which point Emma released me, threw her leg over me to straddle me and impaled herself on my rock-hard dick.

She leaned down, and we kissed as she moved gently back and forth, rubbing her clit against me while squeezing and releasing her muscles, providing intense pleasure. A few minutes later, she shuddered as she had the first of another four orgasms, following which she began moving up and down, bringing me off, pushing herself hard against me as I pumped cum into her.

Emma stayed on top of me and we exchanged kisses until I softened and slipped from her. She gave me one more kiss, then turned, straddling my face and planting her labia on my lips. She lowered her head and once again began pleasuring me with her mouth. This time, though, she took it to completion, and after having three good orgasms from my tongue, I had my release, cum spurting into Emma's soft mouth.

After the last spurt, she turned, we exchanged a deep French kiss, and then she moved from on top of me and snuggled close, one leg and one arm draped over me. We lay quietly for about fifteen minutes, and I savored the experience I'd just had, and looked forward to another fourteen hours with Emma.

"Did you come up with a nickname?" she asked.

"You didn't like any of the ones I suggested," I replied. "Why don't you pick one?"

"Well, she said," an hour ago 'Virgo' would have worked, but not now!"

An interesting revelation, and one that both did and didn't surprise me. Virginity did not imply ignorance, and Bethany's book described things in sufficient detail that even an inexperienced girl would know what to do. Given Emma's obvious intelligence, and her «joie de vivre» everything lined up, and I had no doubt the implication was true, and I shouldn't have been even slightly surprised.

"No comment?" Emma asked about ten seconds later, as I'd failed to respond due to contemplating the situation.

"Sorry," I replied. "I didn't expect that particular revelation."

"Does it make a difference?"

"As a young woman once explained, virginity is simply a state of being, not a thing in and of itself. There are many things we do for the first time, and they are not special because they are the first time, or the tenth time, or the hundredth time, but because they are special things to do. Sex is always special, whether the first time or after a lifetime.

"Another way to look at it is that it's a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. Having sex for the first time is a ceremony recognizing that transition, a symbol if you will, not the transition. In your case, the transition occurred in the terminal at the airport in San Francisco, and we just confirmed it with a ritual."

"I hadn't thought of it that way," Emma replied. "To me, it was simply time, but I can see how what you're saying actually fits."

"Out of curiosity, what caused the change in thinking?"

"I've made out a lot, and I've felt turned on, but never enough to want to go further than kissing. I thought about it, obviously, because the guys wanted more, but I just didn't feel it. With you, the second I sat down next to you and a voice screamed in my brain 'This is THE guy!' and 'You *have* to fuck him!'. I can't explain it, really."

That was Kara's experience when she sat down next to me in Mrs. Brewer's chemistry class just over twenty-two years in the past.

"And was it what you expected? Please be honest; you can't possibly hurt my feelings."

"Weirdly, I believe you."

"Why is it weird?"

"The impression I have from my friends is that guys are really touchy about that subject."

"I'm not."

"You have nothing to worry about! It was everything I'd hoped it would be. And from your reaction, I was knowledgeable enough that you couldn't tell."

"The biggest 'tell' is nervousness or tentativeness. You showed neither. There are no physiological signs for most girls over age fifteen, especially if they're physically active. And there is more than enough information available in books and online that anyone can now the correct techniques for oral sex. Screwing is pretty simple, when you think about it.

"In/Out/Repeat?" Emma teased.

"Pretty much! Sure, there are positions and variations and techniques, but it's simple enough for an inexperienced girl to not give it away if she doesn't want to, so long as she's not nervous or tentative. The old wives' tales about blood and painful intercourse are just that, at least for the most part.

"Younger teens who don't play sports might have an intact hymen, but it's typically very thin and if there's pain, it's more like an injection, and goes away quickly. Painful intercourse is nearly always due to lack of lubrication, which is why foreplay is important. And yes, it's entire possible to be *virgo intacta* at an older age, but that's rare."

"You seem very well informed for a guy."

"I'm going to give good odds you've read *Smart Teens; Smart Choices*."

"My mom gave me a copy when I turned twelve, right before I had my first period."

"Doctor Bethany Krajick and I met in Junior High and we're still friends. Her son and my daughter are very close, well, they will be again once he gets past the whole 'cooties' thing."

Emma laughed, "How old?"

"He's thirteen; she's twelve. They were basically a couple from the time they were little, but puberty is an awkward time. They'll figure it out and get back together."

"And you're OK with that, of course."

"Of course. My kids are independent individuals who have to make their own decisions."

"And if your underage daughter were doing what we're doing?"

"My underage daughter is allowed to have her boyfriends spend the night at the house. You do seem to like using that word!"

Emma laughed softly, "Because I figured you got off on the idea of being with an underage girl. And thinking about it, I should have told you I was a virgin to give you an even bigger thrill!"

"Actually, no, you shouldn't have. I'd have behaved differently."

"Why?"

"I have a habit of overthinking things and talking girls to death to make sure they're really ready to do what they've implied or said they want to do. And that would have been true of you, even though it was obvious to me what you wanted and that you were mature enough to make that decision."

"But the thrill?"

"Works after the fact, too," I chuckled. "What would you like to do next?"

"I believe you promised to use your mouth on my until I couldn't stand it!"

"I did!" I agreed.

IV. I Want to Go Home

December 28, 2002, Chicago, Illinois

 Jesse

"I'm not really comfortable with the idea of being naked in front of a bunch of High School boys," Scarlett said while we were setting up for the party.

"Nobody is forcing you," I replied. "You don't have to join us in the sauna."

"But I feel like if I don't, it's over between us," she replied.

"I'm not sure why you would think that."

"Because you want to do that for the rest of your life, and include your kids, too."

"While that's true, compromise is possible. My dad has variable rules for the sauna, and everyone decides what works for them."

"But you'd be unhappy," Scarlett protested. "And I don't think that's something I could ever do, and I'm not sure I'd want my kids to do it."

"I'm not sure what you want me to say," I replied. "But don't do something you're uncomfortable doing simply because you think I want you to."

"You *do* want me to," Scarlett protested.

"In the sense that I invited you, yes. It's the same with everyone on the hockey team and the softball team who decided to attend."

"But they all agreed."

"All the ones who were at least Sophomores who chose to attend, yes."

"And you're OK with other guys staring at me and getting erections?"

"First of all, nobody is going to stare. We've discussed proper sauna etiquette. As for having an erection, it's normal until you get used to it. I didn't have that problem because I've been in the sauna since I was a baby, but teens and adults eventually don't have the reaction because they learn that nudity does not imply sex. Americans are simply too prudish about our bodies and WAY too hung up about sex."

"And if your *dad* saw me?"

"My dad has seen hundreds, and I mean *hundreds* of naked girls, of all ages, in the sauna, including his sister. He wouldn't stare and wouldn't even really notice."

"Oh, give me a break! Seriously?"

"Seriously. I've seen scores of girls naked in the sauna, including my moms and my sisters. It has ZERO to do with sex. ZERO."

"I think you're wrong."

I shrugged, "If that's the case, then you're probably right about us. What do you want to do?"

"I want to go home."

I suppressed a sigh and said, "I'd prefer you stayed and just skipped the sauna."

"I'm not sleeping with you, if that's what you think is going to happen."

"That's up to you, too. The sofa in our living room is a sleeper sofa, and you're welcome to use it."

"I'm going to call and change my flight."

"If that's what you want to do, and you can, I'll ask my moms to take you to the airport, because I'm hosting the party."

"It is."

"Suit yourself," I replied.

 Steve

"How about a shower and then we go for lunch?" I asked Emma after I'd licked her to a dozen orgasms, and we'd had a slow, sensual screw.

She agreed, and I led her across the hall to the bathroom. I adjusted the shower controls, and once the water was warm, we stepped in and began to wash each other.

"Remember your question about what I want?"

"Yes."

"What would you say if I decided to move to Chicago, become your karate student, get a degree in computer science, and eventually work for your company?"

Liz would object, but I already had made an exception for Cecily Younger, so the key would be to ensure things with Emma ended before it was time to apply for a job. I suspected they would, as she didn't strike me as someone who would, in effect, put her life on hold for a long-term relationship with me.

"I'd say we'd need to discuss it, but it's not out of the realm of possibilities. May I make one suggestion?"

"What's that?"

"Think about it for a few days, when you've had some time to think about it."

"Could I see you again before I go home? Maybe next weekend? Well, in addition to New Year's Eve?"

"We can probably arrange that," I replied. "It would have to be next Saturday, given my commitments between now and then. That would give you a week to think about what you just suggested, and we can discuss it."

"You think the afterglow of sex is interfering with my thought process?"

"It sure does mine," I chuckled.

"I certainly wasn't thinking straight after a dozen orgasms from your tongue, that's for sure! What do you like best?"

"What we just did -- slow, gentle, missionary-position lovemaking."

"I have to assume you've done basically everything a guy could do with a girl?"

"Including multiple girls at once," I chuckled.

"I am SO not surprised!" Emma exclaimed. "Mind if I ask how old you were the first time?"

"Fourteen. She was twenty-three."

"How the heck did a fourteen-year-old kid get a twenty-three-year-old woman into bed?!"

"She asked me," I replied. "She thought I was around eighteen because I looked older as a teen."

We finished washing, rinsed off, and got out of the shower. We dried ourselves, dressed, and then left the apartment for the walk to Potbelly's for lunch.

"Hi, Steve!" Katelyn Shanahan exclaimed when we approached the counter.

"Hi, Katelyn! How is Senior year going?"

"You know, it's Senior year! I can't wait to graduate!"

"How are things with Tim?"

"Great! Who's your friend?"

"This is Emma," I said. "She's visiting from California. Emma, my friend Katelyn Shanahan."

They greeted each other and then we placed our orders.

"Did you hear anything more from my dad?" Katelyn asked as she swiped my credit card.

"No."

"He busted those three cops who tried to shake you down," she said. "They're all suspended as of last Monday."

"Not surprising," I replied. "I take it they found a complainant who had actually succumbed to their scam?"

"I don't know the details, but I think so, yes."

I signed the credit card receipt and Emma and I moved away from the register, and Katelyn helped the next customer.

"You have to explain," Emma said quietly.

"Once we have our food."

My salad and Katelyn's soup/sandwich combo were made, and we took them to a seat near the front window.

"Her dad works in Internal Affairs," I said. "In late September last year, a female cop and her two male partners tried to entrap me into solicitation charges with a supposedly underage girl, but I caught on."

"They had your number," Emma smirked. "But you don't have to pay for it!"

"They actually had no idea. They were targeting professional men in their thirties and forties at Union Station and shaking them down after making an arrest."

"How did you know?"

"I work with teens and young adults at the dojo, and I'm also very good at reading people. The female cop was pretending to be a teenager. She was twenty-six, but looked sixteen or seventeen the way she was dressed and made up. It was her eyes that gave her away. They clearly had run the scam successfully in the past, and at some point, Internal Affairs became aware and investigated. Katelyn's dad called me to ask questions, but given I'd avoided their setup, I didn't have much to offer, as it could have been a legit sting."

"Was that call before or after you slept with his daughter?" Emma asked with a smirk.

"After," I chuckled. "I met her here. It was a complete coincidence that her dad was the IAD investigator."

"I'm going to guess that Tim is her boyfriend?"

"Yes. He asked her to a school dance, and she decided to end our relationship."

"Who approached whom?" Emma asked.

"I ordered, she asked for my card, I gave it to her, she called me, and you've already deduced what happened after that."

"You said the girls approached you, and I took that with a grain of salt, but now I'm reconsidering."

"You should, given with very few exceptions, every girl I've been with since age fourteen has been the one to initiate the relationship. The most important exception is Kara, who I chased in High School."

"And caught, obviously, given you're married to her!"

"Obviously! There was one other, but that was one of the low points in my history. Basically, I set out to corrupt a girl my girlfriend didn't like."

"Wait!" Emma protested.

"I know," I replied. "My entire existence is a complex set of seeming contradictions. I chalk it all up to Loki."

"The Norse god?"

"Yes. I think he's a better personification of Fate than anyone or anything else. Change and chaos are the only consistent things in my life. But I wouldn't trade my life for anything."

"Did you catch that girl?"

"Unfortunately. It created years of turmoil and emotional pain for everyone involved. It took nearly nine years for both of us to make peace with what happened between us."

"That sounds more than just a bad reaction to losing her virginity."

"It was way more complicated. There's a lot about me you don't know, which you'll discover over time if you're here and attend Philosophy Club, which I think you should. Also, let me know when you're ready to apply to college. I know several professors at IIT. I take it you'll start Fall semester 2004 and move here the summer before?"

"You missed the implication of what I said," Emma replied. "I meant move here as soon as possible, so probably June. I can finish High School here."

"I did miss that. I assumed you meant after graduation. Is that going to cause trouble with your parents?"

"Mom will be pissed, but I don't care, given she's married to her job. Dad will be OK with it, and his condo has two bedrooms. It might cramp his style, but he won't object."

"And your relationship with me?"

"If you're good friends with Mrs. Spencer and Ms. Spurgeon, I can't imagine he'd object to me joining your dojo or even coming to your Philosophy Club. I'm obviously not going to tell him about the other stuff!"

"Then I'm positive you should think it through, and we'll discuss it next Saturday."

 Jesse

"Would you be able to take Scarlett to the airport at 4:00pm?" I asked Mom One.

"Why? What happened?"

"We had a disagreement about the sauna," I replied. "She feels compelled, even though I made it clear she could simply skip it. She's uncomfortable with the idea of co-ed saunas, even if it's only family."

"And that caused her to want to go home?" Mom Two asked.

"She said we're through, and despite offering her the sleeper sofa, she insisted on calling to change her flight. I tried to talk to her about Dad's philosophy and about nudity, but she strongly disagrees. In her mind, if she doesn't do it, we're done, and she's not going to do it."

"You know we support you, but are you sure you're making a wise decision?"

"Luna and I spoke to each person who's coming to the party and explained exactly what we intended. Luna and I both discussed the 'nudity is not about sex' philosophy with them. WE could call it off, but I think it's important to get the point across. People need to stop being so prudish."

"You sound like your dad," Mom One said. "And that's a compliment. So long as you're sure."

"I am. I don't think there's any risk of anyone saying anything because everyone has known for over a month and it hasn't leaked. And they all know that no fooling around or teasing is allowed, so we can honestly answer any questions from any parents if they ever arise."

"Are you going to try to stay in touch with Scarlett?" Mom Two asked.

"I'll call her in a few weeks, but I suspect that won't change anything."

"I think one of us should stay as the nominal chaperone with Yuriko," Mom One said. "I'll take Scarlett and Mom Two will stay."

"Thanks," I replied.

 Birgit

"Aren't you going to the hockey team party?" Peter asked Nicholas as we walked to the museum after lunch.

"They didn't invite Freshmen," Nicholas replied. "Jesse talked to me and they wanted everyone to be at least fifteen, and you know I'm only thirteen, even though I'm a Freshman."

"Did you skip a grade or start early?" Julie asked.

"I started early," Nicholas replied. "And it's OK, because I'm not sure I could handle being naked in the sauna with fifteen girls! I might have a very embarrassing problem!"

Everyone laughed, and I thought that was a problem I'd help with if he were fourteen!

"Leave it to Jesse," Peter said, shaking his head.

"As if you'd pass it up!" Julie teased.

"I didn't say THAT," Peter replied. "Just that only Jesse could get the entire girls' softball team naked in the sauna!"

"For the third time," I giggled. "The first two times, he was the only guy."

"«Herregud!»" Kjell exclaimed, shaking his head. ("Holy crap!")

"«Svartsjuk?»" I asked. ("Jealous?")

"«Självklart!»" Kjell chuckled. ("Obviously!")

"There they go speaking in secret code again!" Peter exclaimed.

"Oh, please!" I protested. "Your dad taught you to speak Greek! And you went to Greek School at your church on Sunday afternoons!"

"You don't hear me speaking it except occasionally with Dad! Mostly it's the old men at church, and of course, some of the prayers."

"You go to church?" Kjell asked.

"Yes. We're Greek Orthodox. Birgit's dad's Swedish doctor friend is a member of our church, along with her husband."

"Who's that?" Kjell asked.

"Sofia Katsaros," I replied. "You'll meet her, her husband, and their daughter Alexa, on New Year's Eve. She's my pediatrician. And, when I asked to go on the Pill, and told her who I was planning to be with, she called me a scamp! She also said the boy should be VERY afraid!"

Everyone laughed.

"TMI, Sis!" Albert declared, even though he'd laughed.

"Right," I giggled, "because Kjell is sleeping in the guest room! And your Yorkie will be here on Tuesday!"

"A gentleman who is planning to be an officer does not kiss and tell!" Albert said firmly.

"It wasn't kissing I was referring to!" I declared.

We reached the museum and after showing our family passes, we went in.

 Steve

"What next?" Emma asked when we returned to the NIKA apartment after lunch.

"That's up to you," I replied. "At some point, we should take a bubble bath."

"How about after dinner? Or maybe it's the last thing?"

"That works! I really like everything we've done and we can just keep doing that, but would you be willing to give me a good, hard fucking?"

"Your wish is my command!" I declared.

As she'd requested, we engaged in what I'd once promised Tabitha -- a raw, animalistic, mattress-pounding, headboard-banging, multi-orgasmic fuck, and I surprised Emma by pulling out and cumming in her mouth, instructing her not to swallow before we exchanged a deep French kiss.

"I didn't expect that!" she gasped, breathing heavily after the kiss.

"Which part?" I asked.

"Cumming in my mouth *and* telling me not to swallow first!"

"And?"

"Wild and crazy! I was actually was excited by the way we finished, and you clearly were!"

"As I said, my preferences lie at the other end of the spectrum, but my goal is always to please my partner."

"OK, to ask what the craziest thing you've done is?"

"It's OK to ask," I replied.

Emma laughed and rolled her eyes.

"What's the craziest thing you've done?"

"I think it has to be the threesome where two seventeen-year-old girls started as virgins, I took them around the world and they both pegged me. Seventeen is legal in Illinois, by the way."

"Around the world...as in anal?"

"Yes."

"And I'm going to surmise 'pegged' means the same thing, but I'm curious how that would work."

"A harness and a dildo," I replied. "And lots of lube!"

"And that was pleasurable?" Emma asked.

"Yes, but not physically."

"You've lost me."

"Remember what I said about pleasing my partner? That made both girls happy, so it made me happy. Oh, and I left out one thing -- it was arranged by Kara and she watched."

"NO WAY!" Emma gasped.

"Completely true," I replied. "Kara has both voyeuristic and exhibitionist desires. If we'd followed the typical pattern, you'd have asked her about being with me and she'd have suggested watching, especially if you were a virgin."

"Can this get *any* stranger?"

"Do NOT ask that question," I chuckled. "Asking it guarantees that Loki will ensure it does!"

"Girls ask your wife if they can sleep with you?"

"Yes."

"And she agrees."

"Yes."

"And asks if she can watch."

"Yes."

"*Twilight Zone* time!"

"You aren't the first person to suggest that! I typically use the Lewis Carroll reference of *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*."

"The Heinlein parallels are interesting," Emma observed.

"As I said in San Francisco, it's usually the first book I recommend to my students or anyone I'm mentoring."

"That makes sense. The other thing that makes sense at this point is for me to complete the around-the-world tour."

"You're sure?"

"Positive."

[Cincinnati, Ohio]

 Matthew

"This is a great group," I said to Chelsea as we stood together in the Art Museum.

"I think so, too. I'm really glad I met Pavel and Larisa. I actually like hanging out with them more than the girls from High School."

"Everyone is so mature, including Jordan. It reminds me of my family."

"All of their parents are more like your mom and Eduardo than they are the typical Ohio parents. They're all treated as adults and given quite a bit of freedom, though probably not as much as your dad gives Birgit."

"I think you have that backwards," I chuckled. "Dad tries to rein her in, but *nobody* can control Birgit!"

Chelsea laughed, "There might be some truth to that! Abi is a free spirit, very much like that, but with a bit more self-control."

"That's a low bar," I replied with a grin. "A *very* low bar."

"I was thinking of inviting some of them to visit next summer. Would that be OK?"

"Absolutely. We just need to check with Eduardo about the townhouse, or my dad about guest rooms. Who were you thinking?"

"Abi, Rachel, Pavel, and Larisa."

"Sounds good."

[Chicago, Illinois]

 Jesse

Luna arrived as planned about thirty minutes before the party so she could help finish setting up. I greeted her with a hug and invited her in.

"Where's Scarlett?" she asked.

"She decided to go home," I replied.

"Trouble in paradise?"

"She's upset about the sauna plans. What's annoying is she's known about it for over a month, and I had made it clear it was OK if she didn't participate. I thought everything was cool until she objected this morning and created an impasse."

"What's her problem with it?"

"That she'd have to be naked in front of a bunch of High School guys, but it was more than that, really. You know how our family is with the sauna."

"I was a bit weirded out by that at first because of your moms and your sisters, but I totally get your perspective now, even if I'm not sure I could do that with my kids."

"And that's OK," I replied. "The key is being on the same page. Dad always had variable rules for the sauna, depending on who was around and the day of the week. The key is that his wives and girlfriends are all on the same page with him. And you know my little sisters wear bathing suits."

"Ashley and Stephe, but not Birgit! She'd walk naked down Woodlawn Avenue if she wouldn't be arrested for doing it!"

"That is my sister," I agreed.

"Are you doing anything tomorrow?"

"Just going to church, why?"

"I'll tag along if we can spend some time together afterwards."

"Your parents won't be upset if you go to my church rather than yours?"

"Our priest says going to an Orthodox church fulfills our Sunday obligation."

"You catha-holics are weird!" I teased.

"Oh, please! If there's any mainstream church weirder than the Orthodox Church, I want to know what it is!"

"Well, we don't use actual live snakes in worship, so I think there's weirder!"

"That's why I said 'mainstream'. Pick me up at 7:00am?"

"I could, but you'd need to come to lunch with Jerry, Mia, Mikey, Nicole, Birgit, and Kjell. We're hanging out in the afternoon, too."

"That kind of ruins my plan," Luna grouched. "But you know what? I'll come along if it's OK."

"It is. If you aren't doing anything on Monday, you could come over."

"I'll be at your house at 8:00am!" Luna declared happily.

We made sure the coolers were full of soda and put out snacks. I turned on the sauna and put out towels for everyone to sit on. We had just finished when the Lee, Freddy, and Mitch arrived, followed quickly by Keisha, Jazlyn, and Tyra. Fifteen minutes later, everyone had arrived, and we all went to the basement.

"Team," Luna smirked, "Strip!"

The girls all laughed and began taking off their clothes, as did I.

"What are you waiting for, boys?" Shelly teased.

Hilariously, at least in my mind, the guys were shier than the girls, but most of the girls had participated in at least one of the saunas, and most in both. I totally wasn't surprised that several of the guys held their hands over their groin to cover obvious boners, and we all went into the sauna and sat down, guys on one side and girls on the other, as Luna and I had agreed, with her sitting just to my left.

"OK, this is weird," Owen said, pulling a towel from the pile and putting it on his lap.

"You get used to it," I said. "Just remember the guidelines."

"What guidelines?" Shelly asked.

"It's OK to notice, it's not OK to stare," I replied. "And no innuendos or teasing. Didn't Luna mention that?"

"Just the no innuendos part," Shelly replied. "I guess girls are less likely to stare."

"Speak for yourself!" Jazlyn exclaimed, causing all the girls and some guys to laugh.

"Jesse, who's chaperoning?" Shelly asked. "In case my parents ask when I get home."

"Mom Two and Yuriko," I replied. "Neither of them will bother us at all. But I promised my dad we'd all be responsible, and nobody would drink any alcohol. Drugs aren't a question because both teams can be randomly tested, but beer could get my dad in serious trouble with the law."

"Congratulations, Lee," he said, speaking about himself. "You can be killed fighting for your country, but no fucking way you can have a legal beer!"

"You aren't enlisting, are you?" D'Andra asked.

"No, but I had to register for the draft when I turned eighteen last month. If I don't, no scholarships, grant money, or federal student loans. I'm sorry, but if you can be drafted, you should be able to legally drink."

"No need to apologize," Pete said. "I bet everyone here agrees with you."

There were nods and words of assent from everyone in the sauna.

"What about other stuff?" Destinee asked.

"Europe has it right," I said. "Fifteen for most everything except voting and driving. Some are higher, but Germany is fourteen for age of consent, beer, and wine. I know Sweden is stricter, with eighteen to buy or consume, but none of them are idiotic like the US at twenty-one for alcohol, or completely insane like California with 18 as the age of consent and no close-in-age exemption. Illinois is almost as bad. Ohio, where my mom and dad grew up, is saner -- it's sixteen and as low as thirteen as long as you're close in age."

"Control freaks," Keisha declared. "It's like with abortion -- old men telling girls and women what they can do with their bodies. It's none of their fucking business!"

"They believe you fucking IS their business," Elena declared.

"People just need to mind their own business," Lee declared. "About ALL that stuff."

"Amen, Brother!" Glen declared.

 Steve

"You were right, it *did* get weirder!" Emma declared as we cleaned up after I fulfilled her request.

"You asked for it," I chuckled. "Directly, not just by daring Loki to make it weirder!"

"When you have threesomes, do the girls do stuff together?"

"Some do, some don't. Most experimented once or twice, and that was the extent of it. A few discovered they were bisexual, and one discovered she was lesbian."

"Discovered?"

"The 70s were seriously repressive and her attempts to conform to social norms led to all manner of problems, including alcohol abuse and drugs. She thought, for a time, she might be bisexual, but once she was in a loving, caring relationship with another young woman in a place that was more tolerant than a rural county east of Cincinnati, she realized she was purely lesbian."

"I'm going to ask a question which you absolutely can refuse to answer, but your wives?"

"We all sleep together in the same bed, with all that implies, whether I'm there or not."

"That puts a different spin on it. Your girlfriends?"

"Both are completely straight," I replied. "Just as I am."

"No interest in experimenting?"

"None."

"I have a physiology question -- how many times?"

"Given we've spaced them out somewhat, probably eight total before midnight. But my tongue doesn't wear out!"

Emma laughed, "You said your jaw hurt a bit."

"A minor inconvenience," I replied.

"Twice your preferred way, and the other one a good, hard fucking?"

"Same as before?"

"Absolutely."

 Jesse

When we finished in the sauna, everyone took turns rinsing off -- the guys using the basement shower and the girls the one off the kitchen, and then we went up to the attic room to listen to music and hang out.

"Anyone want to play *Twister*?" Luna asked, seeing the box on the shelf. "Two guys, two girls?"

"Naked?" Simone asked with a smirk.

"I think that violates Jesse's agreement with his dad," Luna said.

"If everyone was seventeen, there wouldn't be a problem," I said. "The sauna could be explained because nobody touched each other, but *Twister* involves touching pretty much no matter what you do."

"Bummer!" Simone declared.

We played fully clothed, and it was still fun, and everyone laughed hard at some of the contortions necessary to avoid being eliminated. Besides *Twister*, some people played *Catan* and *Pirate's Cove*, and at 5:30pm, our pizzas were delivered. We ate, then went upstairs to the attic room, this time to dance.

"Jesse, put on a CD of slow songs," Luna suggested. "Then we'll pair off, dance, and change partners after every song until every guy has had a slow dance with every girl."

"Naked?" Simone teased, causing everyone to laugh.

"You know why Baptists don't have sex standing up, right?" Destinee asked.

"Because it might lead to dancing," I replied, having heard the joke from Dad, causing everyone to laugh.

"I think that would be an even bigger violation of Jesse's promise," Luna said.
"But too bad!"

"You're just no fun, Luna!" Simone declared. "We need to have a party for Juniors and Seniors!"

"Actually, it would have to be seventeen and up, so we stay out of trouble," I corrected. "I don't turn seventeen until February."

"Valentine's Day?" Simone suggested.

"Let me think about it," I replied.

I put in the disk and everyone paired off, with me dancing with Luna first. When the song ended, the girls moved to their right, and Simone was my partner.

"I really want to dance naked with you," she whispered as we swayed back and forth.

"I have to clear that with my dad," I replied. "And he's going to verify everyone is at least seventeen."

"Maybe I'll arrange a private party with you in January!" she whispered, grinding against me.

"Talk to me when school starts again," I replied.

"I will!"

After our dance finished, we swapped, and I danced with Tyra, Keisha, Luna, Tanisha, Shelly, Elena, Destinee, Ayana, Jazlyn, Daniela, Brandi, Simone, and D'Andra, and finally Chung Cha.

"You don't have a girlfriend, right?" Chung Cha asked as we danced, her body pressed tightly against mine.

"No."

"My parents are out of town...if you want to be together."

Despite being used to being around pretty girls, and having had them rubbing their bodies against mine, I hadn't had a reaction until the pretty Korean girl had suggested being together. Chung Cha noticed and ground against the bulge in my jeans.

"STD test?" I asked.

"Yes. And on the Pill."

"I have to be up early tomorrow, so I can go to church."

"That's OK."

"Then stay the night, if you want."

"I do," she whispered, then put her head on my chest and tightened her arms around me.

 Steve

"What High School would you recommend?" Emma asked as we lounged in a bubble bath late on Saturday evening after having completed our three additional rounds.

"Lane Tech," I replied. "It's selective admission, but I'm positive you'd pass the necessary tests and meet the admission requirements. Between Samantha, your dad, and me, we should be able to ensure you can transfer there."

"How long have you known Ms. Spurgeon?"

"Since just before her sixteenth birthday."

"NO!" Emma said, laughing. "Seriously?"

"You inferred from the simple fact that I met her when she was fifteen that she and I slept together?"

"I'm going to wager that you do not have a single friend over the age of fourteen you haven't slept with!"

"You'd lose that bet," I replied.

"OK, then the percentage you haven't slept with is so small as to be meaningless except to the girl in question!"

I tweaked both of Emma's nipples hard in response.

"That tells me I'm right," she exclaimed.

"Perhaps," I replied. "But I cannot name names nor reveal those specific confidences."

"You obviously have a thing for teenage girls; besides your first, how many have been older?"

"Very few," I replied. "And with one exception, the age difference was no more than two or three years."

"How much older?"

"Fifteen years, about a year ago."

"Did you avoid older women?"

"Not specifically, no, but I tend to be the prey, not the predator."

"And girls just come up to you and ask you to go to bed with them?"

"That has happened, but with few exceptions, they receive a mindfuck before a regular one."

"A 'mindfuck'?"

"A conversation with the goal of breaking down their social programming and freeing them from the constraints of what passes for public morality and regimented thinking. Or as my wives have said, I prefer to open their minds before I open their thighs."

Emma laughed, "Nice! You didn't do that with me, though."

"I told my wives that YOU did the mindfuck! Remember, I called you my intellectual equal?"

"But you're totally open-minded."

"Yes, but it's also about who has the upper hand in a conversation such as that one. It's nearly always me. You're one of the few who immediately seized and held the high ground. And for complete disclosure, I find that *very* sexy."

"I shouldn't be surprised by that given your wives are a medical doctor, a PhD research professor, and a pre-law student."

"I've always preferred smart girls; the smarter the better."

"Opposite what I've seen in High School," Emma replied. "And even with the college guys I've hung out with. They're all intimidated."

"Your goal is to find the guy who isn't; that's the one you marry, assuming that's your plan."

"Eventually, but around age twenty-five, at the earliest. How does it work if I date?"

"So long as you don't have a steady boyfriend, and any guy you do more than kiss with has a clean STI test, there's no concern on my part. I don't condone cheating and won't be party to it. As I mentioned, my wives know I'm here, and do not have a problem with it. They'll be amused that I ended up in 'Luckiest Dumb Boy' territory again."

"You're going to have to explain that one."

"My sister has called me a 'dumb boy' since we were kids, and later, a young woman I dated in Sweden called me «jävla idiot», which means 'fucking idiot'. Both were well deserved. 'Luckiest Dumb Boy' is when a perfect girl shows up, wants to fuck, and is a virgin."

"So your fetish is actually teen virgins, not just teens?"

"Yes, but as I've grown older, the opportunities have been reduced, and I'm in a slow transition period."

"Meaning?"

"Around my birthday, I'll begin refusing most approaches, maybe even all."

"Why?"

"Call it a mental block, or whatever you will, but turning forty puts me at more than twice the age of a twenty-year-old, let alone a sixteen-year-old. Will I *always* say 'no'? Probably not."

"I'm curious, but does your transitional thinking mean you'd have said 'no' to me?"

"I seriously hate 'what if?' questions because they're idle speculation. There is no way to know what might have happened if things had been different, and you can't go back and change things, nor predict how you might react in the future with any kind of certainty. That said, I suspect you would have succeeded in getting me into your bed even with my new thinking. Let me ask you a similar question -- how old is too old for you?"

"I'm not sure there's a specific age," she replied. "I was attracted to you, and as I said, you look like you're about thirty. If you looked old, I probably wouldn't have been attracted; no offense."

"None taken," I replied. "We can't control attraction, only action."

"What's the plan for next Saturday?" she asked.

"I'll pick you up at the same time, we'll have breakfast again, but we'll need use the playroom at home, as the apartment will be in use."

"Playroom?"

"The house has servant's quarters just off the kitchen. Our nannies used it over the years, and now it's been dubbed my 'playroom' by my wives. Nobody is allowed in our bed except the four of us."

"That makes sense, but literally every time I ask a question, the answer is mind-blowing!"

"Wait until you meet my kids!" I chuckled.

 Jesse

Around 11:15pm, most of the guests had left, but Lee, Pete, Luna, and Chung Cha had stayed to help clean up. The house wasn't very messy, but there were quite a few empty cans to collect and put in the recycling bin, the floor in the attic room needed to be swept, and the sauna needed to be wiped down. Luna left first, because her dad had arrived to walk her home, and shortly after, Lee and Pete left, in Lee's car. Once they had driven away, I took Chung Cha's hand and led her into the coach house.

"Do you want to be called by your Korean name or your nickname?" I asked as I led her upstairs.

"Either one is OK, and almost everyone calls me Shauna because my name is so different."

"What does it mean?" I asked as we went into my room and I shut the door.

"It literally means 'noble daughter' or 'righteous daughter'," she replied.

"Do you have your test paper?"

"Yes, of course! I remember what Luna said."

She showed me her test paper and her prescription, though on that I would have trusted her. I reciprocated, then turned on my stereo and put in a CD.

"Want to dance?" I asked.

"Naked?" she asked with a smile.

I nodded and began undressing and she did the same, then we took each other in our arms, she pressed her naked body against mine, put her head on my shoulder, and we began to sway gently with the music. Chung Cha was taller than most of the Oriental girls I knew, and was only about three inches shorter than me, with long legs, small boobs, and a neatly trimmed V of black pubic hair.

She was, like all the girls on the softball team, in great shape with great muscle tone, including very firm butt cheeks which I enjoyed running my hands over as we danced. As the team shortstop, she had cat-like reflexes, and I was absolutely positive she was going to be a wildcat in bed. We danced to two songs before she

lifted her head and we exchanged a soft kiss, our tongues tangling with each other.

After a minute, I scooped her into my arms and laid her on the bed. I climbed in after her, we kissed for a bit, then I lowered my head to her boob and licked and sucked her nipple for a minute before switching to the other one, then kissing my way down her body. She was soaking wet, so after planting a few kisses on her labia, I moved on top of her.

"Be gentle," she whispered as I positioned myself against her. "I'm a virgin."

I nodded, kissed her softly, and slowly pushed forward, my glans parting her labia and entering her hot, slick pussy. A few gentle thrusts and I was fully inside her, enjoying the tightness and the soft ripples of her muscles massaging my shaft. Chung Cha wrapped her arms and legs around me and squeezed them tightly. I waited another minute, then began thrusting slowly in and out, with Chung Cha matching my movements.

After perhaps a dozen thrusts, she began moving more urgently, and my prediction of her behavior in bed was proven true -- she began humping wildly and I thrust harder and harder until we were fucking wildly. After a couple of minutes, she broke the kiss, tightened her body, and groaned loudly as she had her first orgasm of the night.

V. You Have a Waiver

December 29, 2002, Chicago, Illinois

 Jesse

"I'm sorry we had to be up so early," I said to Chung Cha when we went to the shower on Sunday morning.

"It's OK!" she replied. "I'm sorry I didn't let you get very much sleep!"

"I am NOT going to complain!" I said as we stepped under the spray.

Only a complete moron would object to losing sleep to have hours of amazing sex with a gorgeous virgin girl, especially receiving her first-ever blowjob! We'd screwed five times -- me on top, her on top, sitting, doggy-style, and me on top again, with a blowjob after her being on top, and sixty-nine before our last time. I'd cum seven times, and only managed about two hours of sleep, but as I'd thought, there was no way I was going to complain.

"Do you think we could keep doing this," she asked. "I mean, I won't be able to spend the night, but maybe one afternoon a week after school?"

I almost laughed because if things went the way they appeared to be going, I'd be back to the «filles du jour» situation I'd had during the previous school year. My only concern was what Zahra might think, but in the end, she wasn't going to become a Christian and I wasn't going to convert to Islam, so it had to eventually end.

"I'd like that," I said.

"Good!" she exclaimed.

We finished in the shower, dried off, went back to my room to dress, and then went downstairs. My moms weren't up, so I wrote on the board that I was going to church, then went across the yard to the main house to get the keys to my dad's BMW. I saw Dad and Birgit cuddling, said 'hi', then left the house. Chung Cha and I got into the car and I drove her to her house, where we exchanged a kiss and said we'd see each other at school.

Five minutes later, I picked up Luna at her house. She waited until I had turned the corner and stopped at a stop sign to give me a kiss.

"I do not want my dad to be suspicious!" she declared as I pulled away from the stop sign.

"Right, because getting up before 7:00am on Sunday to go to church with me doesn't imply anything at all!"

Luna laughed, "I'm a pure, innocent girl who is going to church with a very faithful boy! What could possibly happen?"

"And you think your parents actually believe that?" I asked with a grin.

"Plausible deniability is all I need!" she declared.

 Birgit

"Where is Kjell?" Dad asked as we cuddled on Sunday morning.

"He's still in bed," I replied. "I might have worn him out last night!"

"You are absolutely your mother's daughter," Dad chuckled. "How are things with Kjell besides the obvious 'horny teenager' activities?"

"Good, actually. He and I had a good talk about our relationship, and I'll absolutely see him when I'm in Sweden, but I'm hoping to live in Gothenburg the same as you."

"You can request that, but unless there's a family arranged, you more or less get the luck of the draw."

"Would any of your friends be interested in hosting an exchange student?"

"I honestly don't know, but I certainly can ask. And you know there's always Katt and Mikael."

"True, but they live WAY up north and that would make it tough to see Kjell the way you saw Pia. What about her?"

"She was the one I was going to call first," Dad said. "The others I'll speak to are Suzanne Fjällman, who has a son Ashley's age, or Suzana Jonsson, the daughter of the family I stayed with. She has two boys, who are ten and seven."

"Well, that won't cramp my style!" I declared.

Dad laughed, "Which is the major consideration! I assume you'd like to go to the same «gymnasiet»?"

"Yes! And study the same natural sciences curriculum."

"I'll make the calls and see what they all think. We have plenty of time. You won't even submit your application until September of next year. Will you survive a year without Dad cuddles?"

"I'll have to, won't I?" I said.

"Yes."

"Of course, you could give me something to remember you by!" I teased.

"I'll pick up a necklace or bracelet for you!" Dad teased back.

"So long as it's a 'pearl necklace', yes!"

"Birgit Elizabeth!" Dad exclaimed, but he was laughing. "Where did you learn THAT?"

From Rachel, but there was no way I was going to tell Dad!

"On advice of counsel, I exercise my Fifth Amendment right to remain silent, as the answer might tend to incriminate someone I care about!"

"You can't take the Fifth for that reason!" Dad objected.

"Says you! There is no way I'm going to tell you who told me about that! Well, that's not true! Give me one and I'll tell you!"

"Pumpkin..."

"Sorry," I said quickly. "You know I'm teasing."

"You are, but you also aren't."

"You know I love you, Dad."

"I do. And I love you, Birgit Elizabeth."

 Steve

After breakfast, I went to my study to place a call to Pia.

"Steve?!" she exclaimed. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"You know Birgit is planning to apply to the exchange program and this morning she told me she would like to live in Gothenburg and go to Schillerska. I wondered if you, Harry, and Marta could accept a temporary daughter and sister."

"I'd love to, but Harry as a two-year assignment in London starting next June, so we'll be living there for two years."

"How does that work for you?"

"Volvo is accommodating, and I'll work for them in the UK for two years."

"That sounds like fun. What does Marta think?"

"She likes the idea," Pia replied. "You have to make sure you stop in London if you come to Europe in the next two years."

"I'm not sure what my travel schedule looks like, but I'm sure Albert would be happy to visit when he's in England next summer."

"Still hooked on his Yorkshire girl?"

"Very much so! Did you have a good Christmas?"

"We did. You?"

"Yes, and we had the usual circus on Boxing Day."

"It's always pure crazy around you, Steve!" Pia exclaimed.

"I know," I chuckled.

We spoke for a few minutes, then ended the call. My next call was to Suzanne Fjällman. Her son Sven answered and called his mom to the phone. She was equally surprised by my call, but the answer I received to my question was the same as Pia's, but for a much different and depressing reason.

"Jakob and I separated in August," she said. "And it's not likely we'll get back together. Right now, I can't say 'yes' because I'm not sure where Sven and I will be living once the divorce I'm sure is coming is final."

"I'm sorry to hear that," I said.

"It happens. You know my mom was divorced, and we did fine."

"I know I'm 5,000 kilometers away, but if there's anything I can do to help, let me know."

"I will. You should come visit."

"I don't have any definitive plans, but I promise to let you know when I do. You and Sven are always welcome to visit us here if you need to get away."

"Thanks."

We chatted for a few more minutes, and after we ended the call, I placed a third call, which resulted in a different and positive answer.

"It's too bad my boys aren't older!" Suzana exclaimed. "Paying off bets is fun!"

"You'll get no argument from me on that one!"

"Between you and me, that was *the* best day of my life, bar none! I say a 'thank you' to Viktor Tikhonov every time I think about it!"

I chuckled, "If he'd pulled Tretiak, I might not have scored!"

"And that would have been a travesty!" Suzana replied. "I'll speak to Karl, but I'm sure it'll be OK. I'll get in touch with the YFU office in Stockholm and find out what we need to do."

"Thanks. Birgit will very much appreciate it."

We spoke for another ten minutes, then I went to find Birgit to let her know.

"Cool!" she exclaimed. "Thanks, Dad!"

"It's not guaranteed, obviously, but I can't imagine there will be any problems."

She gave me a hug, then I went to the Indian Room to join Kara and Suzanne. Jessica was working her usual Sunday shift, and the three of us had walked her to work before Suzanne, Birgit, and I had run, something we didn't always do on Sundays, but we'd missed a few days during the holidays, and the dojo was closed, so we needed the exercise.

"Any luck?" Kara asked.

"Yes, and some news. The good news is that Pia's husband Harry is being sent to London for two years, and she's arranged a transfer with Volvo to work in England. The bad news is that Suzanne Fjällman is separated and will likely divorce. The success was with Suzana Jonsson, who said that she and Karl would be happy to have Birgit. She also lamented that her boys are too young to collect on bets!"

Kara and Suzanne both laughed.

"Changing subjects, is there anything we need for Tuesday?" Kara asked.

"Not that I can think of. I don't recall if I mentioned we're having an impromptu, informal Philosophy Club meeting. Audrey, Nalani, and Emma are really interested, and enough people will be here that we can have a decent session."

"I'll be very curious to hear what Dmitry has to say!" Kara declared.

"They won't be here until around 4:00pm, and we'll be done about then. And I think Dmitry will have an immediate conversation with Jesse!"

Kara and Suzane laughed again.

"You have to watch out for those Russian girls," Kara declared.

"Steve survived sleeping with the daughter of a KGB protective officer," Suzanne observed. "I think Jesse will manage with a retired general of tanks!"

"I think Jesse is smart enough to not do anything that would cause Larisa to complain to her dad," I replied.

"Have you considered saying anything to the kids about their Russian ancestry?" Kara asked quietly.

I quickly shut the door to the Indian room.

"Honey, please do not bring up that topic in any way."

"Sorry," Kara replied. "I thought you were going to tell them."

"At some point, but I don't want them to associate Steve Samet's visit with any new information about our family, and I'll need to find a way to tell them that doesn't implicate my dad in anything. The larger problem is how to keep them from asking my dad about it, because that could quickly spiral out of control."

"Your thinking seems to have changed a bit," Suzanne observed.

"It's a fluid situation, and my thinking is evolving," I replied. "My next step, sometime next week, is to sign up for ancestry.com and do some research, though I'll be careful not to link anything, just gather information. Anyway, I'm going to get some tea. Would either of you like some?"

"Yes, please," they both replied.

[Loveland, Ohio]

 Matthew

"You've never been to church with your brother?" Chelsea asked as we turned into the parking lot at Saint George Orthodox Church in Loveland.

"No. We went a few times when I was little, but I barely remember. My dad used to go for their Easter celebrations, but I don't think he's been in years. He did help Jesse's church with their building project, and I know he's done some financial management seminars. But Dad is more in tune with Loki than Christianity. You stopped going when you moved to Chicago."

"I knew you weren't interested and church was never important to me the way it was to Mom."

Chelsea parked, we got out of the car, then walked to the front doors where Pavel greeted us. He led us into the church where we saw Larisa, Rachel, Viktoria, April, and Mark. We followed them into the worship hall, which Pavel called the 'nave' and sat in pews about halfway forward. I would have preferred to sit in the back, but the other kids were all Orthodox, so they wanted to be further forward.

I had no real memory of being in church when I was little, and I found the service both interesting and tedious at the same time, and when it ended more than three hours after it had begun, I felt as if I was being released from custody. We left the worship hall and joined everyone in the parish hall for lunch.

"What did you think?" Pavel asked.

"It was long," I replied.

"I agree," Chelsea said. "At my mom's church, the mass lasts less than an hour."

The priest came over to us and Pavel introduced him.

"This is my dad, Father Stephen; Dad, our friends Matthew and Chelsea, from Chicago."

I shook hands with him, and he asked the usual polite questions, invited us back, then moved on to speak to other people.

After we ate, Chelsea and I left the church to head to Batavia to see some of her High School friends.

"What did you really think?" she asked once we'd pulled out of the parking lot.

"That, in addition to being long, it was tedious! So much was repeated that you could probably cut the service in half if you took out all the repeated stuff!"

Chelsea laughed softly, "That sounds just like you! Looking for the most efficient way to do something! I'm glad you don't do that in bed!"

"I would think you'd be happy if I discovered an efficient way to bring you to orgasm!"

"You brat!" Chelsea exclaimed. "You know it's about more than that!"

"Says the girl who begs for more!" I teased.

"Because I love you!"

"And I love you, too!"

[Chicago, Illinois]

 Steve

My sister, Joel, Patty, and Davey walked into the house just after 10:00am, which was a surprise.

"What are you doing here so early?" I asked.

"We were next door and thought we'd drop in!"

"Is something going on with Terry and Penny?" I asked, concerned.

"Next door on the other side!" Stephanie replied. "The open house."

"I didn't know you were into crime scene tours!" I teased.

"We put in an offer," she said. "All cash."

"I'd say we're paying you too much, but I know where that money came from!"

"So sue me if I made a pile of cash at Spurgeon!" Stephanie exclaimed.

"I don't recall giving permission for you to move next door, Squirt!"

"As if I'd need my dumb brother's permission!"

"What did you offer?"

"The listing price; it's a bit lower than market given recent history, and we want it. I'm positive they'll accept given that it was only listed a week ago."

"Contingent on selling your old place?"

"No, but I don't think that'll be a problem. The houses on our street sell fairly quickly, and they're around the median price for Kenwood, unlike your house!"

"Which would be tough to afford now, given the major increase in property values since Dad and I bought it!"

"We're going to head home, but we'll be back for the family dinner," Stephanie said.

She and I hugged, I shook hands with Joel, who had been quiet, as was his usual practice, then received hugs from my niece and nephew. Once they had left, I let Kara and Suzanne know the news.

"I didn't see THAT coming!" Kara exclaimed. "But it's also not surprising that your sister would want to buy a bigger house than the one she and Ed bought together."

"I agree," I said. "And the price is right, because they undervalued it by about ten percent due to it being the 'Murder House', as everyone in the neighborhood calls it."

"It'll always have the moniker," Suzanne observed. "Well, for a generation, probably."

"Did anything happen with the murder case against Pete Williams?" Kara asked.

"No. I'm not sure what kind of plea bargain he could make, given there's a moratorium on the death penalty being carried out, and I don't see that ever being lifted. He's going to get life without parole, assuming what the detective said about the evidence being damning is true. The only surprising thing is that the kids put the house on the market so quickly."

"Don't you think they had to?" Kara asked. "They're living with their grandmother and there's no way they'd move back into the house where their mom was murdered."

"I don't disagree, it was just really fast."

"The kids will be set, though, right?" Suzanne asked.

"There was a mortgage on the house," I replied. "But given the appreciation in property values, even with the 'Murder House' discount, it'll pay off the note and leave them enough to cover college for both kids, though both of them are supposedly good enough to earn gridiron football scholarships."

Kara laughed softly, "You've adopted your kids' view of what 'football' means!"

"Given I have so many friends overseas and staff who follow European and South American football leagues, that shouldn't really be a surprise! Not to mention Eduardo calling it fútbol. Anyway, I need to change and walk over to Libby's house."

I went upstairs, changed out of the sweatpants and rugby shirt I wore to lounge around the house, and put on khakis and a long-sleeve button-down shirt. I gargled with Listerine, then went downstairs to kiss my wives. That accomplished, I got my fedora, coat, and gloves from the foyer closet, put them on, and headed out the front door.

I was leaving a bit early so I could take a leisurely, indirect walk, more to have some 'alone time' than anything else. With all my commitments to family, karate, and work, and friends, along with my dalliances, I didn't have a lot of time by myself. Of course, I didn't want too much time alone, but some was necessary.

As I walked, I considered what I'd said to Emma, which echoed what I'd said to my wives as well. If the trip to Saint Martin happened, future dalliances with anyone under twenty would be rare exceptions, if they occurred at all. For one thing, the criminal penalties were becoming harsher and harsher, as people like my mom, Kent van der Meer, and Tim Sadler were winning the argument in a bizarre alliance with so-called progressives, who had abandoned their position of the 60s for free love, free expression, and treating teens as adults.

That unholy partnership was pushing the idea that young adults in college were still 'children', in the sense that they needed to be 'protected' from 'adults'. The Republican Party had been captured by evangelical, fundamentalist prudes, and had, for the most part, rejected Ronald Reagan's views on government. If the creation of the Department of Homeland Security didn't prove that, FISA courts certainly did.

People had, as they nearly always did, traded their freedom for security theatre. It was always a losing proposition, and sadly, the trend was continuing, to the point where an Orwellian surveillance state was being created, and Americans were fast approaching the point where denouncing your neighbor was an acceptable thing to do. The US and the East Bloc had, in effect, swapped positions, with the East Bloc -- including Russia which was being led by Vladimir Putin, a man I had met when he held a different role -- moving towards freedom and the US moving towards totalitarianism.

As I walked up to the front door of Libby's house, I pushed those thoughts aside to focus on the seventeen-year-old -- and legal -- young woman who had chosen me for what she called her 'first fuck with an adult'. As I reached for the doorbell, the door was flung open and Libby grabbed my arm and pulled me inside, causing me to laugh.

"Somebody is impatient!" I chuckled.

"Somebody doesn't want nosy neighbors seeing her with an older guy when her parents are out of town! The last thing I want to do is have trouble with my parents!"

"Well, I'm all yours for the next six hours."

"Six hours; six times! Or is age messing with your refractory period?"

"I may not be a teenager, but I'm also not old enough to have encountered that problem; at least not yet!"

"Let's go upstairs!" Libby exclaimed.

I followed her up to her room, which was large and nicely appointed, with an ensuite bath.

"Did you have a plan?" I asked as she shut the door.

Libby licked her lips, winked, then said, "First, I'm going to give you an amazing blowjob. After that, you're going to lick me to a bunch of orgasms, then we fuck! You on top, followed by sixty-nine until you're ready again, then me on top. We break for some food, then sixty-nine and sex again, followed by a tit fuck where you cum on my face. Then sixty-nine so you can complete the 'around the world tour'. The last time is whatever you want, no limits, no restrictions. Is that wild enough?"

"I'd say," I chuckled.

"I thought about inviting a friend, but I decided I want you all to myself!"

"That's probably best," I replied. "Am I correct in assuming this is a one-off?"

"It think it has to be," Libby replied. "I really don't want anyone besides you, me, and Jesse to know!"

"That makes complete sense."

She went to her desk and extracted an envelope.

"My permission slip!" she declared.

I confirmed the recent date on the clean STI test and handed it back. Libby put the envelope back in the drawer, then turned to face me.

"And now, for your viewing pleasure, a sexy seventeen-year-old body!" she exclaimed.

I watched as she removed her jeans, t-shirt, bra, and panties, revealing large, firm breasts, a flat stomach, and a perfectly smooth mons, devoid of any hair.

"Well, that answers *that* question," I chuckled.

"Do you prefer shaved, trimmed, or untamed?"

"Trimmed," I replied. "Not that I'm dumb enough to reject the alternatives!"

"Any pussy available to you is perfect?" Libby asked with a smirk.

"The same as with any breasts I'm allowed to fondle, kiss, and suck are just fine!"

"Most guys prefer big boobs and shaved pussies, or so the internet seems to indicate."

"I'd take anything I read or saw on the internet about sex with a truckload of salt," I chuckled.

"Obviously! Your turn!"

I quickly removed my clothes and stood naked a few feet from Libby.

"You're in really good shape!" she exclaimed.

"For an old guy?" I asked with a smirk.

"Oh, please! Thirty-nine is not old! Isn't Jesse's grandpa eighty-five?"

"Yes."

"That's old! And even he's in good shape, considering!"

"He certainly is."

"Get into my bed so I can give you an amazing blowjob!"

"You realize that only a great fool would say a blowjob was 'bad' if the girl lets him cum in her mouth, right?"

"And you're not a great fool?"

"I clearly must choose the sexy teenager in front of me!"

"Wise decision!"

I climbed into the bed and propped myself with pillows so I could watch. Libby climbed in after me, sliding down and planting a kiss on the glans of my already erect dick. The vision of a girl fellating me made the experience all the more enjoyable, and Libby's promise of an amazing blowjob was fulfilled as she used her lips, tongue, mouth, and hands to pleasure me.

With Libby being experienced, I held out for as long as I could, and she continued the enthusiastic, extremely pleasurable blowjob until I groaned deeply, and pulsed, filling her mouth with my cum as Libby lashed my glans with her tongue, stroked me, and gently squeezed my sack. When the pulses

subsided, Libby released me and moved up so we could share our first kiss, which, unsurprisingly, was with her mouth still full of my cum.

"Amazing?" Libby asked after she broke the fierce kiss two minutes later.

"Amazing!" I agreed.

"Your turn!"

She moved to her back, and I began with her firm breast which were capped with large, brown nipples, licking and sucking for several minutes before I moved down between her legs, kissed her labia, then pressed my tongue between them, coating it with her coppery juices. Libby had a prominent clit, making it easy for me to bring her off multiple times. I wasn't sure how she defined 'a bunch', so after four orgasms from my tongue, I moved up, positioned myself, and slid smoothly into her silky tunnel.

Libby hadn't specified *how* she wanted to fuck, so I defaulted to my preference of slow thrusts, grinding against her every few thrusts, giving her five orgasms over the next twenty minutes before pushing as deeply into her as I could and pumping cum into her spasming pussy.

"Totally NOT what I expected!" Libby declared when I stopped thrusting after our mutual orgasms had passed.

"Believe it or not, that's my preferred way. I promise to pound you into the mattress later, if that's what you want."

"That wasn't an objection, by the way, because I had five great orgasms! I just expected you to be more vigorous."

I chuckled, "I promise the last time will be what I've called raw, animalistic, mattress-pounding, headboard-banging, multi-orgasmic fucking where I'll pound you as hard as I can, then pull out and cum in your mouth."

Libby laughed, "Challenge: Accepted!"

 Jesse

After church, Luna and I met Mikey, Nicole, Jerry, Mia, Birgit, and Kjell at Bacino's on Wacker Drive for pizza.

"Bummer of the day," Nicole said, "my parents are coming to your dad's New Year's party!"

I laughed, "It's not as if it's a Bacchanalian gathering! And besides, we'll spend most of our time at Amber's house with the teens and tweens. The youngest kids will be in the coach house with two chaperones. We won't have any, though Terry will check on us about once an hour just to keep the parents happy."

"A lot can happen in an hour," Mikey smirked.

"Graduation can't get here soon enough!" Nicole declared.

"It's 2004 for Jesse, you, and Mikey, right?" Mia asked.

"Yes. I think Luna is a Senior."

"I am," Luna said. "I'm going to Arizona State next Fall."

That made me think of CeCe, and I wondered how she was doing.

"Scholarship?" Nicole asked.

"Partial," Luna replied. "It's tough to get a spot on a Division I team, because there are something like 300,000 High School softball players and only 5000 Div I roster spots."

"Hockey is probably about the same," Nicole said. "Mikey and I are hoping to be scouted together, but that's going to be tough because there are so few girls' teams. All the schools with girls' teams have guys' teams, so if I am recruited, I'll let the scouts know they need to convince the men's team to recruit Mikey."

"You guys are that serious?" Mia asked.

"I'll marry the idiot if he ever asks!" Nicole declared.

"You guys are sixteen, right?" Mia inquired.

"Mikey turned seventeen in October; I turn seventeen in March. But I'm sure he's the right guy!"

"And I have no way to support a wife," Mikey said. "So she's just going to have to wait. And it's not as if she's not getting the milk for free now!"

We all laughed at Mikey turning around the usual comment about guys.

"Will you face each other in the playoffs?" Luna asked.

"Not until the finals, if we both make it," I replied. "The round-robin is two sets of four teams, and the winners play for the city championship. We'd play the suburban champs in the first round of the regionals, then the winner of the collar county champs. If we win THAT, we go to Springfield for the state championship, with three other regional winners."

"How many teams are in the first round?" Luna asked.

"Eight from the city, eight from the burbs. We play three other city teams in the round-robin stage. Our big advantage for winning is that our group includes four, six, and eight, while the other is two, three, five, and seven."

"Who's in your group?"

"Chicago Latin, Lane Tech, and Saint Patrick Catholic. We play the winner of the group with British International, Brother Rice, St. Rita, and De La Salle."

"Our group is tougher," Nicole said. "We have Waubonsie Valley, Naperville Central, and Glenbard East. We beat Glenbard but lost to the two Naperville teams."

"By one goal each," Mikey said. "And those were our only two losses to teams in the burbs. We only lost to Jesse's team and Brother Rice in the city."

The waiter brought our pizza, and that was the end of the conversation as six hungry kids dug into the deep-dish pan pizza.

 Steve

"Another surprise," Libby declared. "I never expected THAT, either!"

I chuckled, "If I had no problem French kissing after the blowjob when you hadn't swallowed, and putting my tongue in your pussy after I'd cum there, I'm not sure how licking my cum off your face and chest is such a surprise!"

"I guess I just didn't know what to expect from you. As much as I've flirted and teased, I had no idea what you liked or what you wanted to do. And I promised myself no comparisons."

"Wise."

"Now that I've crossed 'father and son' off my bucket list, have you had a mother and daughter?"

"More than once," I chuckled. "And the opportunity for one I passed up."

"OK, I have to ask -- why?"

"I was fifteen and was WAY more interested in my friend than her mom, and my friend would have objected."

"Twins?"

"Yes, together, even."

"I'd ask about multiple partners, but you're married to three women, so I think that's a sure thing!"

I chuckled, "I had my first foursome when I was fifteen. And for my twentieth birthday, there were five girls, but serially, not simultaneously."

"How old were you your first time? Fourteen?"

"Yes, and she was nine years older."

"Jesse was my first, and only, guy; I've been with six different girls."

"You're dating Lilibeth now, right?"

"Yes, but it's temporary. She's going to BC when she graduates, and I'm going to Harvard. She also is like Mom One and wants nothing at all to do with a dick penetrating her. She's not even interested in experimenting."

"Don't push that," I counseled.

"I know. I spoke with Mom One about it and she gave me good advice. I want a situation like yours, with a guy and a girl, so Lilibeth isn't really an option. I suspect I'll meet the right guy and girl at Harvard."

"What kind of law do you intend to practice?"

"I'm not sure. Criminal defense is cool, but the lawyers I spoken to, including Aunt Melanie, say it can be super frustrating."

"I do like how you talk like a member of the family," I replied.

"What's the saying? When in Rome? You know how much time Jesse and I have spent together and how close we are."

"True."

"Ready for the final stop on the round-the-world tour?"

"As I'll ever be!"

"Minus the erection you need, but sixty-nine will solve that! The lube is in the nightstand drawer."

 Ashley

"Have fun with Libby, Dad?" I asked with a sly smile when he came into the house late on Sunday afternoon.

"How the..." he asked, but had a smile.

"I think and I know things!" I smirked. "And I watch and listen! Your secret is safe with me!"

"And to think I called Birgit the 'Neighborhood Watch'," Dad chuckled, shaking his head.

"Aunt Stephanie said they're buying the house next door!" I said.

"She told me this morning," Dad replied. "I need to find Kara Mom and Suzanne so we can walk to the hospital to get your mom."

Dad left, and I went back to the kitchen to help Yuriko, Stephie, and Natalie with dinner.

"Dad's home," I announced. "He, Kara Mom, and Suzanne are leaving to get Mom from the hospital."

"Ashley-chan, would you stir the soup, please?" Yuriko asked.

"Of course!" I replied.

I went over to the stove, pushed the step-stool over, and climbed up. I picked up the wooden spoon, and stirred the pot, then tasted it.

"I think it needs a bit more onion and garlic," I said.

"Add small amounts, please," Yuriko instructed. "Then let it simmer a few minutes before you taste it again."

I added two pinches of garlic powder and two of onion powder, stirred them in, and waited two minutes before I tasted it again.

"Perfect!" I declared.

"Thank you! Would you make sure Albert set the table, please?"

"Yes!" I exclaimed, climbing down off the step-stool.

I walked to the dining room where I saw all the places were properly set. I returned to the kitchen and let Yuriko know Albert had done his chore, which, had he not, would have been shocking. He was the most 'squared away' person in the house, and even had all his shirts lined up by color, facing the same way, and evenly spaced in his closet!

 Steve

"How in the heck did Ashley know where I was?" I asked Kara as she, Suzanne, and I walked south on Woodlawn Avenue.

"What happened?" Kara inquired.

"She met me at the door and asked if I'd had fun with Libby! I did NOT say anything to her, and I'm sure none of you did, and Jesse didn't know it was going to be today, and he was out with his friends."

"She thinks, and she knows things!" Suzanne repeated. "Don't ask me how, but *nothing* takes her by surprise or gets past her!"

"TELL me about it," I chuckled. "Birgit wishes she was half as clued in as Ashley is!"

"They say it's the quiet ones you have to watch out for," Kara declared. "So, DID you have fun with Libby?"

"Yes. And today was a one-time thing. It's something she's wanted to do for some time, but she's not interested in trying to have a secret relationship."

"Was it as wild as she suggested?"

"Absolutely! Lots of sixty-nine, with three screws -- me on top my way, her riding me wildly, and a hardcore fuck at the end. There was also a tit fuck and, of course, she wanted the final stop on the 'round-the-world tour'."

"So you're all worn out now after Emma and Libby?"

"Invigorated," I countered. "But I'm going with my stated plan. Obviously I'll be with Avanti, but other than the potential Saint Martin trip, it'll wind down, and other than some rare exceptions, there won't be anyone under twenty-one."

"You still plan to fulfill Kristin Jaeger's request, right?" Suzanne asked.

"Yes, and her friend's as well. I mean new girls."

"We'll see!" Kara declared. "What about when Natalie leaves?"

"That's a few years in the future, and I'll worry about it then. And what do you mean by 'we'll see'?"

"You need your dose of virgin blood!" Kara exclaimed.

"And you need your voyeuristic fantasy fulfilled!" I chuckled.

"He didn't say never, Kara," Suzanne observed, "just rare exceptions. And if the trend I'm seeing with girls at UofC is representative, there won't be a shortage of twenty-one-year-old virgins who'll need a mindfuck, along with the other kind."

"Sadly," I replied. "Society is going to Hell in a handbasket."

"You could always provide stress relief for future doctors, too," Suzanne suggested. "Jessica is positive at least four or five of them would avail themselves of that service!"

I chuckled, "She's probably right about that, based on the flirting."

We reached the hospital and Jessica, Allyson, and Lucy walked out together.

"Hey, handsome!" Lucy said, surprising me with a kiss on the cheek.

"Hi," I replied.

"Can anyone do that?" Allyson asked.

"It's a free country," Jessica declared.

Allison stepped up and rather than a kiss on the cheek gave me a quick peck on the lips and winked.

"Later, Jess!" Allyson said, and she and Lucy walked away.

I hugged Jessica and gave her a kiss, then Kara and Suzanne hugged and kissed her, and the four of us began walking home.

"They'll be at the New Year's Eve party," Jessica said. "And you have a waiver!"

VI. Are You Trying to Confuse Me?

December 29, 2002, Chicago, Illinois

 Steve

After dinner on Monday, my wives and I went to the Indian room to relax.

"I'm curious why you offered the waiver," I said to Jessica.

"I honestly don't think it would cause any problems," Jessica replied. "The same is true for the med students, given your seminars are optional and not graded. I totally understand making any NIKA employees totally off limits, but the hospital and medical school? No. That expands the pool of candidates, given your plan to implement a nobody under twenty-one rule, which I suggest should be eighteen."

"With rare exceptions, though, right?" Suzanne asked.

"Yes," I replied. "As I think about it, it could only be for 'cousins' whose parents wouldn't object, and honestly, there aren't many who've shown any kind of interest."

"There really aren't that many of them," Kara observed. "Amelia Tarrance and Alexa Katsaros are twelve and Amber Penfield is thirteen, so even they are a few years away. I believe Amber is a sure thing, but I don't think the other girls have expressed any interest or even flirted."

"They haven't," I replied.

"And neither Stephe nor Ashley would tolerate their friends receiving an 'expert deflowering'," Suzanne observed.

"As I said, the field is limited," Jessica interjected. "Obviously, it's up to you, Tiger, but as I aid, eighteen seems like an appropriate floor, with those other exceptions. Girls that age are in college or working full time."

"I was more concerned about the absolute age difference than anything," I replied.

"You need your dose of virgin blood, Snuggle Bear!" Kara declared. "Eighteen will be easier than twenty-one."

"Not the way the world is going," I replied. "But I will listen to my wives' counsel and take it under advisement."

"Are the plans set for Saint Martin?" Jessica asked.

"I spoke to the girls' moms today," Kara said. "They all gave permission, provided Steve and I chaperone, and we don't let the girls roam without supervision."

I chuckled and said, "That's not going to go over well with Her Royal Highness, Birgit the First of Kenwood!" I chuckled.

"I did get the moms to agree that the girls could go to the beach that's more or less across the street from the house," Kara said. "That should help."

We were interrupted by the phone ringing in my study. I got up and waked to answer it.

"Steve Adams," I said.

"Hi, it's Nadia! We keep playing phone and IM tag."

"Sorry about that. This time of year is very busy, and things were messed up by an emergency at work and my own failure to remember I had out-of-town guests arriving. Unfortunately, the next day I have free would be Friday, the 3rd of January."

"I suppose that will have to do. Maybe I should just tell you what I want to do, because it sounds as if our schedules won't easily match up. I wanted to do it face-to-face to be able to gauge your reaction. OK to just tell you?"

"Yes."

"I have two fantasies. The first one is being a sixteen-year-old virgin babysitter and seducing the hunky dad when he drives me home and my parents are out."

I chuckled, "The fantasy of every married guy who drives a nubile babysitter home, and probably quite a few of the babysitters."

"I was tempted a couple of times when I was fifteen and sixteen to actually try to seduce the dads of kids I was babysitting, but I chickened out."

"I never had the opportunity to seduce a babysitter or be seduced by one because we always had nannies for our kids. It sounds like fun. What's the other fantasy?"

"It's the dark one," Nadia said quietly. "I fantasized about losing my virginity to an older guy while I was tied up."

I was VERY uncomfortable with rape fantasies because of Bethany and Michelle, and I had turned down a similar request from Alicija Czerwinski, one of Birgit's grade school teachers.

"I have a serious concern about non-consensual sex," I replied. "Even simulated."

"You mean rape?" Nadia asked. "That's not what I mean. I'd beg you to do things, and you do them. Totally willing and totally consensual."

"I'm curious about how that fantasy developed."

"It's something that popped into my mind unbidden when I was thirteen and it became stronger as I got older. It's something I really want to do, and it's fantasy that could actually happen."

"Implying..."

"That I'm still a virgin. I've made out some, in both High School and when I was getting my Associate's degree, but I never met anyone I felt I could tell what I wanted. Nobody but Danielle knows about either of those fantasies, and if I have to choose one, it's the one that would be real. I hoped you would be willing to do both. Danielle wasn't sure, but she said you were the safest guy she'd ever met."

"Do you have both mapped out? The role playing and the dark fantasy?"

"Yes. For the babysitter fantasy, we would start at your house, with you coming home with your wives, then role play you driving me home. You would take me to my parents' house so we can use the bed I slept in while I was a teenager. It's OK because they're on a cruise and don't come home until the 4th. For the other one, you come to my apartment, or I come to your place. I have soft ropes if you don't have any. I could IM you a script beforehand so you know exactly what I want and are sure it's consensual."

"I need to think about that one, but the role playing one sounds fun. Let's plan for the 3rd, and I'll call or IM you about the bondage fantasy."

"OK. Talk to you soon! And please don't cancel again!"

"I do apologize for the circumstances."

We said 'goodbye' and I went back to the Indian room.

"That was Nadia, Danielle's friend," I said.

"Interesting fantasies?" Kara asked with a smirk.

I chuckled, "One I never had an opportunity to try -- the virginal teenage babysitter seducing the dad who drives her home."

All three of my wives laughed.

"You did get two nannies!" Jessica observed.

"Neither of them were virgins," Kara countered. "Winter was, but she wasn't actually a nanny, and she got Steve before we hired her as our domestic."

"All true," I said. "It would be total roleplaying, and a lot of fun. Her other fantasy is dark -- losing her virginity while tied to the bed. She insists it's not a rape fantasy and offered to provide the list of things she wanted done in the order she wanted them done in advance."

"You turned down Alicija Czerwinski," Kara observed.

I nodded, "Because it was quite clearly a rape fantasy. This one isn't so cut and dried. It's actually closer to what Elyse and I once did, where she had me tie her up and fuck her silly for hours."

"How did Nadia actually lose her virginity?" Suzanne asked. "If you know, that is."

"She didn't," I replied.

My wives all laughed once more.

"Luckiest Dumb Boy strikes again!" Kara declared. "She really wants to lose her virginity that way?"

"Yes. She said the idea simply sprang into her mind when she was thirteen, and has been growing stronger ever since. That doesn't surprise me, the growing stronger part, because the more she thinks about it, the more she'd want to do it. For her other fantasy, she was tempted several times when she was fifteen and sixteen, but never worked up the courage to actually try it."

"What are you going to do?" Jessica asked.

"Think about it," I replied. "Obviously, the babysitter fantasy is something I'd do, but the other one is questionable."

"We do stuff like that from time to time," Kara said. "And you did with Elyse."

I nodded, "I know, but I still want to think about it. It's one thing to play the way we do, in a well-established relationship. It's another thing entirely with a random deflowering. In any event, I'll see her on the 3rd."

"Is there anything we need to do before Jon and the family arrive?"

"I believe we have everything we need for them, and for the party. Is anyone up for a sauna?"

"Will you be up in the sauna?" Kara asked mischievously.

"If my wives wish that to be so, then it will be so!"



December 30, 2002, Chicago, Illinois

 Birgit

"What are you doing today?" I asked Dad as we cuddled in the sunroom on Tuesday morning.

"Hanging out with Audrey, Brad, and Isabella until it's time to pick up Nalani and her boyfriend, Jung He, at O'Hare. You have your photoshoot today, right?"

"Yes. Bob is going to shoot pictures of Meghan and me, and probably some with Kjell, too. Bob's friend Mariana is going to help."

"Just remember the limits, please, Pumpkin."

"The government needs to mind its own business!" I growled. "They aren't actually protecting me! THEY are the ones abusing ME!"

"That is what your fellow citizens want," Dad said.

"My 'fellow citizens' are freaking morons!" I declared. "Every single time someone says 'think of the children' they make things *worse*, not better!"

"I don't disagree," Dad said. "That's the entire point of working under the radar with Philosophy Club and your Hangout."

"It worked in the 60s, but I don't think it will work now," I observed. "9/11 changed things and now everyone wants to be 'safe' no matter how little actual safety they receive in return for giving up their rights!"

"A daughter after my own heart!" Dad declared.

I snuggled close, loving how safe I felt in Dad's arms.

"I want to change my trip to New Hampshire to stop in New York City for one night so I can see Marcella," I said.

"That's fine," Dad replied. "Your moms, Suzanne, and I are taking a long weekend in New Hampshire in April. Katy had a cancelation and offered it to us."

Which made sense, given we were going to Saint Martin over Spring Break. I hoped Bob would be able to go, because if he couldn't, I wasn't sure who I could invite. I'd try Tomás, but his parents were very conservative.

"Breakfast is ready!" Yuriko announced from the door to the sunroom.

"Be there in three minutes!" I replied, tightening my arms around dad and snuggling as close as possible.

 Jesse

"What did you want to do today?" I asked Luna when she arrived at my house just after breakfast.

"I thought that was obvious!" she replied with an inviting smile.

"Is that all I'm good for?" I asked with a goofy smile.

"You're a great goalie, too!" Luna replied.

I laughed, took her hand, and led her up to my room. Two hours later, sweaty and sated, Luna was stretched out on top of me, her chin resting on her arms, which were crossed on my chest.

"When does hockey practice resume?"

"The 2nd," I replied. "And our first game is against Chicago Latin on the 11th. We play Saint Patrick on the 18th, and Lane Tech on the 25th. We play for the city championship on February 1st, assuming we win our group. You start your indoor practices in February, right?"

"Yes. I don't think I told you that I'm going to room with CeCe in the Fall."

"You didn't," I replied. "That's cool."

"You guys are kind of on the outs, right?"

"Once she decided to go to school in Arizona, it was tough to maintain our relationship. I'm not upset with her or anything, but I know she was disappointed that things kind of came to an end."

"She's not upset with you, and she's been dating. And that means I don't have to worry about coming between you."

"Now there's a picture!" I chuckled.

Luna laughed, "A fantasy of yours?"

"Been there, done that!" I smirked. "But the participants' names cannot be revealed to protect the guilty!"

"Simone talked to me about a special Valentine's Day party."

"She mentioned it to me, too, but we'd have to be VERY careful about who was invited. You'll be eighteen by then, and to be totally safe, nobody under seventeen could be invited if it's going to be like what Simone hinted. And even then, I'm not sure my dad would be OK with it, because parents would lose their minds."

"Simone is only a Sophomore, so she wouldn't even be able to come to the party she wants you to host. She turns sixteen in March."

"The only way it could work is either nobody under seventeen or nobody older than seventeen," I said. "Anything else opens my dad, moms, and aunts to all kinds of potential trouble. I honestly don't care what the government thinks, and age doesn't matter if it's just one-on-one, but once you have a group, there are too many variables."

"Even if everyone promised not to say anything?"

"I'm not sure how you could ever be certain," I said. "Again, one-on-one is different."

"Forget the law for the moment, would you do it?"

"Sure," I replied. "I mean, so long as we set clear boundaries and everyone agrees in advance."

"I know absolutely for sure neither Simone nor I would say anything, and I'm positive Destinee, Shelly, and Elena would agree to keep it totally secret. I bet Pete, Jack, Freddy, and Tom would be cool about it, too."

"Just out of curiosity, did Simone expect it to go beyond naked *Twister* and dancing?"

"I don't think she intended an orgy!" Luna declared. "But with ten people naked together, who knows?!"

"An orgy would cross a line I don't think I'm prepared to cross," I said. "And even if I was, my dad isn't going to agree. If we were all over eighteen and had our own place, he wouldn't care. But society has its head so far up its butt about sex in general, and teen sex specifically, that the risk of doing something like that in his house is just too great."

"Changing subjects back to college, are you applying anywhere except UW Madison?"

"Minnesota and BC," I replied. "But I'm positive I'll get into UW."

"Are you being scouted?"

"Coach said scouts will be at the tournament, so I'm sure someone will talk to me at some point. That said, I'm pretty sure I prefer to play club hockey rather than Div I. I want to focus on school and do what I need to do to find a coaching, scouting, or management job with a pro team. What's your major going to be?"

"Computers. Yours will be business, right?"

"Yes, with a minor in computers."

"What if you can't find a job with a hockey team?"

"There are plenty of sports options, including baseball, plus, of course, entry level management jobs in non-sports companies. I have plenty of time to work it out! How about you? Silicon Valley?"

"I'd love that! Obviously, Redmond, Washington is another option."

"Microsoft? Really?"

Luna laughed, "I'm not a Mac fanatic like everyone in your family! Once more before we shower and have lunch? Then a sauna?"

"Works for me!" I agreed.

 Steve

"What are your plans after graduation?" I asked Audrey as she, Brad, Isabella, and I drank hot cocoa in the sunroom.

"Hang onto your hat," Audrey declared. "Brad and I are both going to seek commissions in the Navy."

"I didn't see THAT coming!" I exclaimed in surprise. "What brought that on?"

"Opportunities, really. Neither of us really like the job prospects, and after speaking with an officer recruiter, we decided we'll go for it. We haven't signed yet, but we'll do that once we get back to Columbus."

"The Navy has been pretty good to many of my friends," I said. "Not to mention my dad. And Albert is going to try for an appointment to the Naval Academy. What about you, Isabella?"

"Grad school for a Master's in International Relations."

"You should absolutely speak to my friend Mary, who'll be here tomorrow. She works for the State Department. She's Chief of the Russian Desk. I'll introduce you."

"Thanks!"

"Did you guys have anything specific you wanted to do today?" I asked.

"A sauna, for sure," Audrey said. "Otherwise, just hang out. Well, and Isabella hopes you'll fuck her brains out!"

"AUDREY!" Isabella screeched.

"It's true, isn't it?" Audrey teased.

"That's outrageous, even for you, Audrey!" Brad declared.

I chuckled, "She was almost as outrageous at her sister's wedding, so it doesn't surprise me."

I also had taken note that Isabella was a beautiful Hispanic Steve type, but hadn't given any thought to her beyond that, and neither she nor Audrey had hinted at anything before the comment Audrey had made.

"Audrey! I'm going to KILL you!" Isabella declared.

"Oh, please!" Audrey protested. "You purposefully had an STD test before I came to Chicago, and you have the test paper in your pocket!"

"Argh!" Isabella growled.

"Dial it back a bit, please, Audrey," I requested.

"Thank you!" Isabella exclaimed.

"Audrey," I said, "I do have to ask -- did you tell Brad and Isabella how we usually use the sauna here?"

"It must have slipped my mind!" Audrey replied with a smirk.

"Uh huh," I chuckled.

"What are we missing?" Brad asked.

"The norm for the sauna here is fully naked," I replied. "No bathing suits or towels. But if anyone is uncomfortable with that, we can use towels."

"Adults, right?" Isabella asked.

"Our family has very Scandinavian values in that regard, so kids, too. Both with the family, and some of them with their friends."

"This place becomes crazier by the second!" Isabella declared.

"My late dear friend Jorge didn't call it *Cirque du Steve* for nothing! Or, as someone else called it, the Madhouse on Woodlawn."

"Late friend?" Brad asked.

"He was killed by a drunk driver just over nine years ago. My wife, the medical doctor, was in the car as well; she survived, obviously."

"Man, that sucks. Did the drunk survive?"

"Not this time, but that is a fairly common thing, unfortunately."

We finished our hot cocoa and then headed to the basement. I was curious to see what would happen, and it totally didn't surprise me when Isabella and Brad both requested we use towels. Ten minutes later, the sauna was heated, and I ladled water onto the rocks. As the steam began rising, Yuriko and Natalie appeared at the door wearing robes. Without a word, they closed the door, and came in about a minute later with towels wrapped around them.

"How were things at home?" I asked Natalie.

"Pretty good, though Nicole told my parents she and Mikey are going to get an apartment together in Madison, rather than live in the dorms; well assuming they both get in there. You can imagine how that went over with my dad."

"I can. Your mom was OK with it, right?"

"Yes. She's known about Mikey and Nicole since it started; Dad just now figured it out, and he's not happy."

"How old is she?" Audrey asked.

"Sixteen, the same as Mikey and Jesse. They all played hockey together before High School."

"Mind if I ask how old you are?"

"I don't mind at all," Natalie said. "I'm twenty."

"You're the one who's going to Russia for grad school, right?" Audrey asked.

"I'm obviously not the one going home to Japan when I finish my degree!" she smirked.

"Yuriko, what year are you?" Audrey asked.

"Sophomore, but I'm twenty-two. I studied with my grandfather for two years before coming to the US, and I'll return to Japan after I complete my Master's degree in horticulture."

"How did the two of you meet Steve?"

"I met him in Japan when he visited the karate dojo where my best friend is the wife of the master, though then she was fifteen, and not yet engaged. Of course, I was a silly school girl at that point, and didn't see Steve again until I came to Chicago to study."

"And I met him in Russia when I was fifteen," Natalie said. "The team Mikey, Jesse, and my sister played for was invited to play teams in Russia, and I went along. I fell in love with Russia, and decided to get a degree in Russian history with a minor in foreign relations then work on a Master's and PhD in Russian history at «Европейский университет в Санкт-Петербурге» -- the European University at Saint Petersburg."

"You both live here full time?" Isabella asked.

"We're the live-in girlfriends," Natalie said with a sly smile. "Yuriko goes back to Japan each summer, and this summer I'm going to Russia for two months, but otherwise, yes, we live here."

"Girlfriends?" Isabella asked skeptically. "Steve said 'housemates' when he gave the tour!"

"Steve is circumspect with newcomers," Natalie replied. "But nobody hides that fact, right, Yuriko?"

"Right!" Yuriko confirmed happily. "We both love him, and he loves us, but he cannot provide the two things we both need, or a third thing which I need. For both, it is to be a husband and father children; for me, it is someone who will live in Japan."

"Three wives, kids by four women, and two girlfriends?" Isabella asked.

"And the freedom to fool around!" Audrey declared.

"Any tips?" Brad asked with a smirk, earning himself a faux glare of annoyance from Audrey.

"Don't piss off the girlfriend," I said. "You'll live longer!"

All the girls laughed.

"The logistics must be 'interesting'," Brad observed.

Natalie smirked, "We all know how to share! We learned that in kindergarten!"

"Can I ask why?" Isabella inquired.

"Because he provides what we need at this point in our lives," Yuriko said. "Love, compassion, friendship, intimacy, and companionship."

"But don't mistake intimacy for sex," Natalie quickly added. "They're two very different things."

"How so?" Isabella asked,

Natalie smiled, "That's something we've discussed at length in Philosophy Club, but the short answer is true intimacy is the joining of souls, not bodies. When Yuriko and I each marry, we'll continue to be very intimate friends with Steve, though sexual intimacy will end. But that's really a pale, limited version of intimacy compared to the merging of «kami» -- the animating life force, or spirit, or soul, if you will, though not precisely.

"In most cases, though not all, what we call a 'mindfuck' precedes a physical fuck. That is, a long, detailed conversation designed to break down preconceived notions, open the mind, and forge a truly intimate relationship. Or, as someone said, opening the mind before opening the thighs. And that second thing doesn't always happen. Steve has several very intimate female friends with whom he has never had sex."

"This is all just out in the open?" Brad asked.

"More or less," I replied. "As Natalie said, we're a bit circumspect with newcomers, but we don't hide it. The ultimate goal is subversive -- to develop a group of people who reject social convention, believe in freedom and liberty, and who reject Puritanism in all its forms, whether religious or secular, left or right. The same is true for authoritarianism. Fundamentally, people should be free to do as they please unless they harm another person or violate their rights."

"A perfect example is my marriage. There is literally no harm done to anyone by Kara, Jessica, Suzanne, and me believing we're married, or Jennifer and Josie being married. My kids are all intelligent, healthy, well-cared for, and mature. Having a very extended family has actually been positive. Granted, it's a different form from the typical Hispanic or Oriental extended family, but it provides all the same benefits.

"In addition, our kids are given near total freedom to determine the course of their lives, and have the autonomy to make their own decisions. All of them have run their own lives since they were toddlers, and very successfully, because we've taught that with freedom comes responsibility. Do they make mistakes? Absolutely! But then again, so do I. That's one of the most important ways to learn.

"Anyone who thinks that my theory of child-rearing is harmful has to deal with the fact that Jesse is a star athlete and at the top of his class; Birgit holds a black belt in Shōtōkan and is also at the top of her class. Matthew is an excellent actor and singer, and is on the debate team, and is a very good student; Michael is on the robotics team and is also an excellent student. Albert is a pilot at age thirteen, though he can't get his license until he's seventeen; he's also planning on going to the Naval Academy, as I said earlier. Stephie and Ashley are both excellent students and both are brown belts in Shōtōkan. In other words, it works."

"My parents were pretty controlling," Isabella said.

"Have you heard anything here with which you disagree?" Natalie asked.

"Not really, though it's pretty strange and 'out there'."

"You should come to the impromptu Philosophy Club meeting tomorrow. You'll see what this is all about."

The door opened and Jesse stuck his head in.

"How much longer will you be?" he asked.

"We're basically done," I said, standing up.

The others stood up and followed me out.

 Jesse

"What was with the towels?" Luna asked after I put the 'Privacy Please' sign on the door to the sauna.

"I'm going to guess Audrey's boyfriend or friend wasn't comfortable being naked. There are some family friends like that, and my Aunt Stephanie's husband was squeamish about it when he first started coming here while they were dating. If you think about it, it's a pretty big thing for most people given social views on nudity and sex."

"Speaking of sex..." Luna smirked.

"Is that all I'm good for?" I asked with a grin as she moved onto my lap.

"No, of course not! I said so before! But we have limited opportunities, so I have to make the most of the ones we do have! We do lots of stuff together that isn't sex!"

I chuckled as I moved my hand to cup her firm boob, "I know that. I was teasing!"

When we finished fooling around, I filled the whirlpool, and we got in, with Luna sitting between my legs and reclining back against me.

"Some of the girls from the softball team want to come to your Hangouts. Would that be OK?"

"Yes, though it's important to understand that we talk about pretty much any topic you can imagine, often in depth, and sometimes the conversations are R-rated, and occasionally even beyond that. And not just sex -- drugs, abortion, racism, discrimination, and a host of other controversial topics. Basically, if you can't deal with a George Carlin skit, you shouldn't be there. And if your parents would pitch a fit, you have to be careful what you say to them."

"I've never listened to George Carlin," Luna replied.

"You absolutely should. His philosophy is very much in vogue in our group, along with Frank Zappa, not to mention ancient Greek philosophers and Enlightenment thinkers. We also talk about religion, including Eastern religions."

"You know, if we invited Simone, Destinee, Shelly, Elena, Pete, Jack, Freddy, and Tom to your Hangout, you could get a good feel for if they'd blab about the party."

"That's a good idea," I observed, though I hadn't figured out where we'd meet because Libby was going to go to my dad's Philosophy Club meetings.

"You know what else is a good idea?" Luna asked, shifting and turning so she could straddle me.

 Steve

"There's a shower in the bathroom there to rinse off," I said. "It's really only big enough for one, so you'll need to take turns. Isabella, you can come upstairs with me or wait, whichever you prefer. Yuriko and Natalie will use their shower."

"Uhm..." Isabella hemmed and hawed.

"Just a rinse in the shower," I said. "I wasn't implying anything more."

"There is no safer person on the planet than Steve," Natalie said. "He means it."

Isabella nodded tentatively, we grabbed our clothes, then she followed the three of us up the stairs. Rather than go to my room, I walked to the playroom, to avoid breaking any marital rules. I shut the door to the kitchen behind us, and walked straight to the bathroom, putting my clothes on the vanity, with Isabella following suit.

"You can go first if you want, and I'll wait in the other room, or I can go first, and you can either stay or wait in the other room."

"You'd really just drop your towel in front of me like it was nothing?" she asked.

"The answer is a nuanced 'yes' -- I would, but not if it made you uncomfortable. That's why I offered the options I did."

"And you'd expect reciprocity?"

"Expect? No. That's up to you. What Natalie said about being safe is absolutely true -- nothing happens that makes you uncomfortable or that you don't want to do."

"I was positive you would suggest showering together," Isabella said.

"I did think it, but given the totality of the circumstances, I felt it was inappropriate to say it, so I didn't."

"Most guys would at least try, especially after what Audrey said before!"

"First of all, I'm not most guys. Second, a desire to do a thing is neither a compulsion nor a promise to do it. Third, Audrey revealed something private which she should not have revealed, and it would be uncouth to act on it."

"Are you for real?" Isabella asked.

"I am. Unless you object, I'll go first. You can stay or not, it's your call, and staying does not mean you give me permission to stay when you shower. You have to tell me it's OK."

"This isn't an act to try to seduce me?"

"It's not an act. Whether it's seductive or not is irrelevant. I'm going to turn on the shower, wait ten seconds, then get in."

I did as I'd said, and it didn't surprise me when Isabella didn't leave the bathroom. Of course, it wouldn't have surprised me if she'd left, either, as I had no idea what she wanted to do, if anything. I quickly rinsed off under the tepid spray, which helped cool me down, then stepped out, grabbing a towel from the rack to dry myself.

I made a silent bet with myself that she wouldn't ask me to leave, and I won it when she dropped her towel, revealing a well-toned and sexy body. I didn't avert my eyes taking in both her neatly trimmed black pubic hair, her small, firm breasts, and her tight butt.

I finished drying myself and decided the best option was to wrap the towel around myself and wait to see what happened, as either standing naked or dressing sent messages I didn't feel were appropriate to send. Isabella got out of

the shower, grabbed a towel, and quickly dried herself. then stood facing me, the towel held in front of her, covering her from collarbones to knees.

"You want to, right?" she asked quietly.

"That's not the correct question," I replied. "The correct question is do *you* want to. If you do, then it's up to me to say 'yes' or 'no'. Your decision shouldn't be based on mine."

"Do you seriously expect me to believe that if I drop the towel and say I want to do what Audrey suggested, you might say 'no'?"

"Whether you believe it or not, that is absolutely possible."

"This is what Natalie was referring to, isn't it?"

"Confounding expectations is part of what we call the 'mindfuck'. The entire point is to get you off balance and force you to think things through, not simply do what's expected or what social convention says you should do. And the situation is complex, and I would need to be sure you thought through the ramifications."

"Which ones?"

'Having sex with a married man who is nearly forty, for starters. In the moment it might seem to be a good idea, but will you regret it tomorrow? Or next week? Or next year?"

"How can I know what I'll think a year from now?"

"You can't. The question comes down to whether you're prepared to deal with the regret if it arises. If not, don't do it. Another consideration is how you feel

about me telling my wives about the encounter, because the price of freedom, as it were, is full disclosure. And there's one more consideration. Have you seen *Risky Business*?"

"Duh! It's classic Chicago like *The Blues Brothers* and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*! Why?"

"Miles, despite mostly being full of shit, teaches Joel an important principle in *Risky Business*. Do you remember it?"

"It's not 'Princeton can use a man like Joel' because that's the Admissions guy."

"The principle is this -- *If you can't say it, you can't do it.*"

"You mean what Audrey said?"

"As an example, but it could also be understood as making an affirmative statement or making a clear request. Words have power that thoughts can never, ever have. The myth around summoning demons is apropos -- saying their secret name gives you power over them. In the same way, saying something out loud gives it power and manifests it."

"Are you *trying* to confuse me?"

"That's part of the point of the 'mindfuck' -- to force you to think about things you've never thought about and never realized, and to think in ways you've never thought before. Let me put it this way; which is more powerful - thinking you love someone or telling them?"

"Telling them."

"Even if they know you think it?"

Isabella smiled, "Got it! Vocalizing something makes it real in a way that thinking it could never do. What about writing?"

"Also powerful, but spoken words are even more powerful. Reading a speech by a great orator is not the same as hearing it. A great orator can move people in ways the written word never, ever can. That said, the written word has its own power, which we acknowledge with the aphorism 'the pen is mightier than the sword'. That's true, but spoken words put both to shame."

"That makes sense."

"We have conversations like this at our Philosophy Club meetings. Imagine a room full of people doing this."

"Naked?" Isabella smirked.

"We've actually done that. It was early on, and was done to prove to everyone that nudity and sex do not HAVE to go together."

Of course, in that case, it had led to Elizabeth offering to help Ben with his raging erection which, in the fullness of time, had led to them having a baby together.

"Don't guys get hard?"

"Initially, yes, but had we used the sauna naked, I wouldn't have. Brad might have, but once you're used to it, it doesn't happen because you've broken the social conditioning that being naked means you are about to have sex. We could be having this conversation naked, get dressed, and go about our business. That's normal; what society says is 'normal' is actually not. That's even acknowledged in the book of Genesis when Adam and Eve were naked and weren't self-conscious until after they broke the rule God had set for the tree."

"Hang on! You believe that?"

"It depends on what you mean. There are spiritual and philosophical truths taught in Genesis which are true irrespective of whether or not God created the world in six days, formed both Adam and Eve from the dust of the ground or formed her from his side, and a talking serpent who is not identified as Satan. So yes, I believe the truths taught there, even if I don't believe it's true."

"Mind. Blown. Not just by that, but how easily and fluidly you answer and ask questions."

"Our Philosophy Club has met regularly for most of the past twenty years, though we called it a 'rap session' initially."

"You know Audrey is going to think we're doing it, right?" Isabella asked.

"Who cares what Audrey thinks?! She shouldn't have violated your confidence in that way, and I'll discuss it with her. In fact, I'll make that the topic for tomorrow's impromptu session. I won't use names, but she'll know it's her. And, if it's something you do want to do, it doesn't have to be today. You can wait until Audrey goes home and we can get together sometime in January. You're also welcome to come to Philosophy Club. I'll make sure you know the days. You can also decide you don't want to do it and still come to Philosophy Club. The two have nothing to do with each other."

"You are the strangest guy I've ever met! And I mean that in a positive way."

"You aren't the first one to notice that. The ball is in your court now. We can dress and rejoin the others, or you can drop the towel and ask me for what you want."

Isabella was silent for a few seconds, then let her towel fall away.