



## THE CULT – PART 1

*Taken from the statements of Randy Carter, police detective.*

*(Story by Z.O.B. Industries. CW: Weight gain, slob, gas, dark themes, abuse, force feeding, restraints, occult themes.)*

You've heard of the Manson Family. You've heard of Jonestown, and Ted Bundy, and Waco. But in between these sharp, bloody spikes in the Richter scale of American history, there are smaller, more subtle jumps and quivers that shake the foundations of our great and confused nation.

I remember the first time the Sons of the Black Goat shoved their collective evil dicks into my life. My partner, Detective Clarita Montez, tossed it over to me one morning in 1991 as I was munching on a cup-o-noodles from the Chinese place down the street. Clarita and I were the only female cops in the precinct, and we only got away with holding that position because Cornucopia, Mississippi was just small enough to avoid the political firestorm of hiring women as law enforcement in nineteen-ninety-one. God, what a shitty time that was to be alive. It almost makes me miss the Eighties, but anyone with nostalgia for that dog-shit decade probably forgot the negatives in a coke-addled haze. I know I did.

Anyway, Clarita throws me the file and says "Check this out." I picked it up and skimmed through it.

"Missing persons files... statues found at kidnapping scenes... 'Rita, what the hell is this?'"

“Punishment for doing our jobs, mostly.” She was running on several days of no sleep and less coffee, and her cream-colored angular face was clouded with rage. “Commissioner Hickman didn’t like the way we handled the Bayou Killer case. He had Danvers hand this off to us as a ‘special assignment.’”

“God dammit.” My desk was already swarmed with busy-work the detective sergeant, Billy Danvers, had dumped on us. Normally I would have welcomed the challenge—the boys’ club around us was only tolerant when we kicked ass, and we were good at kicking ass. But I was tired, and off my game, and I’d been busting my ass since six in the morning on this shit. “Tell him someone else can take this. We’re busy.”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“Why? Because Billy ‘Where’s My Coffee, Bitch’ Danvers is gonna to get his panties in a twist?”

“No.” She tapped the file. “Because no one else seems to give a shit that over thirty women across four states all disappeared under similar conditions.”

I frowned, and took another look at the photos. She was right. The victims were every possible age and ethnicity, from seventeen to nearly forty, and their kidnappings shared one thing. “They were all... fat?”

“Most of them. There’s a few skinnies in there, but for the most part, these girls were big. It’s all the good country feedin’ around here.” She affected a Midwestern drawl, and I rolled my eyes. Clarita was half Mexican, and she loved to poke fun at the bumpkins around here. I’d been raised just across the border in Louisiana, so I was a bit more sympathetic.

But not much. One thing you discovered doing police work in the seventies was, people were usually assholes. And when they weren’t assholes, they were monsters. That was just the way things were. You could arrest a thousand scumbags and creeps and there would still be ten thousand more infesting every little town, every ghetto, every suburb. The decades changed, but people didn’t. I had been looking for a reason *not* to believe this for a very long time, and nothing so far had changed my mind.

“Okay. I’m making this a priority.”

She paused. “Really?”

“Clarita, we’re looking at over two dozen kidnappings. The file says there’s no leads, and yet we’ve got evidence—material found at the crime scenes. This smells like someone’s trying to sweep it under the rug.”

She pulled a bottle of tequila from her desk, poured a nip into her morning tea, and stashed it before the Sarge could see. “Yeah. Which is why they gave it to us.”

“These women had families. People they loved, who miss them. They deserve better than commissioner fucking Hickman telling them there’s nothing we can do.”

She sipped her spiked tea. “All due respect, Stevens, but... these girls were mostly loners. Social rejects. One of them was almost four hundred pounds, for God’s sake. Maybe...”

“What?”

“Maybe they ran away. You know. Found some boy looking for more cushion, and split.”

I shook my head. “I don’t think so. Not all at once.”

She snorted. “Just saying. Maybe they’re better off, wherever they are. Stranger things have happened.”

I sighed. Clarita was a whip-thin exercise addict—she had no sympathy for those who ate themselves into social obscurity. I was a bit more sympathetic, because I’d been a fat kid once. I’d lived for the soda jerk and five-cent chocolates and sugary cereal in front of the TV on Saturdays. It had taken relentless, vicious bullying all the way through elementary school for me to toughen up and decide to change my body, become predator instead of prey. But I’d seen some of my peers stay that way: soft, weak. Retreating into more and more food instead of learning to survive. Hell, some of them were probably on this list somewhere.

“Pack your shit. We’re getting some witness statements.”

She chugged her tea, belched, and dropped the Styrofoam cup in the trash. “Alright... if you insist, bleeding-heart. Time to Sherlock some *gorditas*.”

Since then, I’ve wondered. If we had known where the case would take us, would I still have strapped on my gun and badge so enthusiastically? If I’d foreseen, somehow, the depths of fucked-up depravity waiting for us, would I still have walked out that door?

I don’t know. I really don’t know. I have a reputation for going the extra mile, for trying to be a superhero in an age of corrupt cops and rampant designer-drugs. But I think if I had known the kind of horrifying perverted madness we were heading into, I would have burned that file... and ordered a shit-load of donuts instead.

Flipping through the dossier, I lit a cigarette. “Okay. [There’s a couple places we could start...](#)”

### *Which witness should I investigate first?*

- 1) ***Shanay Daniels, sister of a recent victim. Lives in a trailer park. Reported her sister missing last week—the trail is probably still fresh fresh.***
- 2) ***Henrietta DuBois, mother of another victim. Trophy wife to a local business magnate. She’s a royal spoiled bitch by all accounts, but her daughter was taken a month ago—long enough for her to get over the initial impact, and maybe make a credible witness statement.***

- 3) *Dana Chambers, local street prostitute. Apparently her friend was kidnapped a few days ago, with creepy statues left at the scene. Their pimp isn't talking, but maybe a glass of wine and some kindness might get Dana to open up to a cop.*



THE CULT – PART 2

*Taken from the statements of Randy Carter, police detective.*

(Story by Z.O.B. Industries)

Detective Montez and I drove up to the huge, white-columned home of Henrietta DuBois with mutual scowls of disgust. The place had been a plantation until the Civil War, and even afterward it had continued to employ “indentured servants” until the government finally came knocking. After that, the DuBois family had gone into stocks and bonds—in my opinion, only a slightly less shady business than slavery. Recessions didn’t cause themselves, after all.

We got out of the car and advanced up the pristine white-marble steps. The place was undeniably beautiful, flanked by weeping-willow trees and set against the natural tangle of the swamps, but it was

still a little creepy. Blood had built those columns, and I had no doubt the DuBois knew that. It was why they refused to move, even after hundreds of years. When your home gathered enough dark rumors and power around it, eventually changing your ways seemed less attractive than crouching in your mansion.

Inside we were greeted by a slender footman with complimentary fans for both of us. The place was warm and stuffy, with only a few rooms cooled by air conditioning, and I could feel sweat gathering between my tits, forming a valley of sticky humidity. The two of us were led into the parlor, where Henrietta was sitting on a futon, eating grapes.

Henrietta was a big woman. I don't mean "big" as in just heavy, or flabby, but "big" as in corpulent, as in the wealth of her family seemed to have inflated her. She wore a long skirt and an old-fashioned corset, complete with lace cuffs. I thought maybe lounging around and acting like a queen was sort of her deal. You could always tell, with rich types, when they'd settled into a "routine" that they refused to get out of. A routine established by money. From the huge color TV set into the far wall and the bowls of fine chocolates around her, Henrietta's routine was very well established.

At least this room was air-conditioned. I sat down, watching Henrietta primp her plump cheeks and brush curly locks of hair out of her chubby face. "Mrs. Dubois, I'm Detective Carter. This is Detective Montez. We appreciate you meeting with us, on such short notice."

She sniffed, dismissive and haughty. "Y'all have women detectives now? I do declare." She popped another grape in her mouth. It was pretty clear to me how she'd attained her nearly two-hundred pound girth, and I found my lip wrinkling in distaste. Of all the sins in the world, laziness to me always seemed the most revolting. The woman was rolling in money and influence, and she chose to sit around on her big fat keister, gobbling fruits.

Well, I wasn't here to write an op-ed. "Yeah. We do," I said, and took out my notebook. "Your daughter disappeared... twenty-nine days ago, is that correct?"

"Yeah." She sighed, and for the first time I detected something other than arrogance in her attitude: a deep, abiding sadness. "Georgette was a willful girl. At first, I thought maybe she'd just gone off with one of her boys. Georgette did love them boys—I'm always telling Harold, we ought to put the girl in a convent. But he wouldn't listen."

“I see.” Clarita was watching Henrietta with patient curiosity, writing in a notebook of her own as she scanned the room. I approved of the rich woman’s nervous glances at my partner: it was something about Clarita, maybe her Hispanic features or her eerie silence, that put witnesses off-balance. Sometimes it was annoying, but right now it was useful. We needed this fat lump off her high-horse, to squeeze more info out of her.

I cleared my throat. “Did she... talk about any new boys she’d met, before she vanished? Any new boyfriends, maybe one she was especially happy about?”

The woman shook her head, double-chin bunching. “No. She just went out like she always did—going to diners and restaurants with them, getting a free meal from those foolish little studs. She was crafty, my Georgette. She knew how to reel ‘em in.”

“Wonder where she got that from,” said Carlita, examining a picture of Henrietta’s husband on the wall. It was huge, maybe four feet tall, and signed by the man himself as if he’d felt the need to mark his territory.

“I don’t know what you might be implying, Detective,” drawled the fat heiress, “but my Georgette was a smart one. She’d never elope unless the money was good. I raised her right, in that way.”

“I’m sure you did.” I tried to keep her eyes off Clarita: my partner was circling the room now, peeking into vases and china teacups. She was up to something. “Did you notice anything odd about her behavior, before she disappeared?”

Henrietta frowned. “Well... She did put on a few pounds, in the weeks before it happened. But I didn’t see no problem with that. We DuBois girls are sturdy... built for luxury, y’see.”

“Uh huh.” Built for stuffing your fat faces, more like. I made a note. “How much weight would you say she put on?”

“Oh, thirty... maybe forty pounds.”

“In what span of time?”

She shrugged. “Two or three weeks. I told her to watch them milkshakes, but she wasn’t listening to me. Girl never did listen.”

I shared a glance with Clarita. That was pretty odd. Three weeks was a very short time to pack on that much weight, especially with the “active” lifestyle Georgette seemed to have. Chubby or not, it sounded like she’d slept with every boy in the tri-county area. That much sex would keep you decently fit even if you took every cock on your back, while full of poutine—like it seemed she had done. “Would you say she seemed... tired, or in pain before the disappearance?”

“No, ma’am. She was full of pep and vinegar, my girl. If anything she seemed... kind of pleased. Kept looking at herself in the mirror.” Henrietta frowned, as if surprised by her own recollection of this detail. I had to force back a smile. It was a curious thing, how witnesses always knew more than they thought. If you could press them in the right way, the good stuff came rolling out.

“You don’t seem very concerned,” said Carlita, examining a Georgian cabinet, “for a woman who’s lost her only daughter.”

Henrietta stiffened, and I winced. Carlita was brutally direct when she wanted to be, while I preferred a softer take. Because pushing a witness too far had lost us plenty of leads.

“I beg your pardon. I am deeply grieved, Detective. You do me disrespect.”

Somehow, I didn’t think Henrietta took kindly to disrespect, from servants or cops. We’d lost our witness: she was scowling now, popping grapes in her mouth at a rapid-fire pace. Pop, pop, pop. “We didn’t mean to imply anything,” I began. “We’d just like to know how the disappearance has affected you...”

“Kidnapping. Call it what it is, ma’am.” Now I started to get a little annoyed. I was no spring chicken, but “ma’am” was a stretch. “She was taken from me. You think that doesn’t hurt me? You think that doesn’t scare the pants off me?” She waved us away. “Get outta my house. Let a mother grieve, in her own way.” And she reached for a bowl of chocolates.

We were escorted to the exit. The footman shut the big white double-doors, and I turned on Carlita. “What the hell was that about? We barely even got through basic questions.”

“Didn’t need them.” She nodded at the big house. “Henrietta’s too arrogant and stupid to be a suspect. And I found us a lead, while you were trying to play kid-gloves with the bitch.” She produced a small statue from her pocket. “This was inside one of the vases.”

I frowned. “That’s a Venus of Willendorf type thing, yeah?” The statue was rotund and bigbreasted, with a bloated belly and huge thighs. It fit in the palm of Carlita’s hand, but its size didn’t make it any less creepy. Mostly because it didn’t have a head.

“Yeah. Like the one they found when the girl was taken.”

“Why would the kidnapper put two in the same house? There was one on the bed, too.” She tapped her forehead. “It’s a calling card, Carter. When does a criminal leave a calling card?”

I swallowed. “*After* committing a crime. He’s taken someone else around here, too—not just Georgette. But who?”

She turned the statue over in her hands, examining the dark stone it was carved from. “I don’t know. And I don’t know if it was from here, or from somewhere else, or if he’s just fucking with us. But we better find out... before more of these things start showing up.”

*Well, shit.*

We had our first witness statement. We had another clue that somehow Forensics had missed—assuming it hadn’t been added to the vase, later on. And we had the strange fact that Georgette had gained weight, before disappearing. Why? Was the kidnapper overfeeding his victims, before taking them? What possible purpose could that serve, especially when a bigger victim would be harder to abduct? It made no sense. We needed more info, more data, and soon.

But where to look for it?





### **THE CULT - PART 3**

*Taken from the statements of Randy Carter, police detective.*

*(Story by Z.O.B. Industries)*

We'd talked to the rich bitch, and we'd gotten nowhere. I was sick of messing around: we needed a *real* witness statement, from someone reliable, not someone who was actively trying to fuck with us. God, I was just starting on this case and I already needed a drink.

I told you I used to be kind of a fat-ass, right? Well, the truth is, I was a fat-ass *and* kind of a drunk. We're talking full beer belly back in the police academy, wide dumpy ass, big fat tits I was incredibly ashamed of. I worked hard to get rid of this weight after the academy, and when I made detective against all odds—in the company of men who hated me for having a pussy, and men who wanted so badly to fuck me I could almost smell it—I promised myself I'd never be that weak again.

So when we passed by an old haunt of mine, a bar called Paunchy's, on our way to the next interview I got this awful urge to go inside and have a drink. It was a shameful urge, pathetic, and I had to pinch myself to shake it off.

*You don't need that shit*, I remind myself. All those AA meetings and interventions from my sister had to mean something—had to mean I was done. I turned back to the road, as Montez lit a cigarette and thumbed through a dog-eared map of the New Orleans suburbs.

“The last disappearance in this area was a girl named Thelma Jacobs,” said Montez. “Supposedly she works for a pimp called Freddie Bigs—but nothing’s proven. Her pal Dana Chambers reported her disappearance, but when we brought her in for questioning, she had a black eye and a whole lot of nothing to tell us.”

“Makes sense.” I wondered if the pimp might be involved. It seemed unlikely—kidnappings were too high-profile for anyone involved in the sex industry. We already had profiles on all his local johns, so why would Freddie Bigs expose himself by orchestrating theatrical kidnappings?

*“Femininity is a cosmic glutton,”* said Montez, from the passenger seat, her voice echoing strangely..

“What?” I swerved slightly. “Montez, what did you say?”

She stared at me. “I said, this is our stop. Right here—this is the corner Dana works.” She squinted. “Randi, are you alright?”

“I’m... I’m fine.” My hands were shaking on the wheel, and I parked the car and shoved them in my pocket. Clearly that little drive past Paunchy’s had messed me up more than I expected. I had flashbacks of the beer sliding down my throat, filling my belly, overflowing it... Memories of squatting to piss in strange alleys, puking in strangers’ toilets, swam in my thoughts. God, how had I even made it this far? It was a miracle I had even graduated the academy.

“Let’s go, then.” She was calm, but I could see her looking at me as we got out. Montez wasn’t stupid—she knew something was wrong with me. I struggled not to judge her for it as we advanced on the flophouse where Freddie’s girls did their dirty work.

I knocked on the door and found a Colt .45 in my face.

“Woah! Easy, there,” I told the tiny, bruised girl behind the door. She was dressed in a stained nightgown, her ribs standing out. “Put that down, honey. We’re not here to raid you.”

She slowly lowered the gun. We were cops, sure, but we were *female* cops—an unusual sight in this state. Hell, an unusual sight in this *decade*. She trusted us just enough to let us in, with a warning. “Freddie’s out, but he’ll be back soon. You better geddafuck out of here before then.”

“Duly noted.” We asked her where Dana was, and she told us. We advanced up the filthy staircase into the flophouse, stepping over heroin needles and mouse droppings. Advancing to one of the doors, we exchanged a glance with each other.

On Dana’s door was scratched an hourglass shape oddly similar to the statues we’d found.

We went inside. Dana was on a reeking, moth-eaten sofa that stank of semen and sweat. Against the wall was a TV, on the coffee table were cigarettes and Twinkie wrappers—dozens of them. And that was it. There was nothing else in the room other than a cooler which I assumed held more food.

The reason for this overstocking of calories was clear. Dana was fucking enormous. She was easily the fattest prostitute I’d ever seen, weighing at least four hundred pounds. Rolls upon rolls of brown flesh spilled out of her lingerie, over which was draped a bathrobe that looked more like a vest on her massive body. She wheezed and huffed as she turned to look at us, sweaty flaps of fat bulging out over and under her yellowed satin bra.

“Th’fuck you want? Leave me alone.”

She had been crying, I could see that. Tears streaked her cheeks, and half a Twinkie was in her hand, the cream filling staining her fingers. I pitied her as soon as I looked at her. She had a large afro and soulful, deep brown eyes full of pain. I could tell she’d been forced into this life—she wasn’t numb to it like most of the girls we pulled in off the street. Being used like this upset her, and it appeared that when she was upset, she ate.

*Not so different from me, back in the academy.* Except my “food” had been alcohol. I flashed my badge at her, and she flinched. “Hey. Stay calm, miss. We’re just here about your friend, Dameika.”

She looked at us suspiciously, gobbling down the Twinkie. “You ain’t give a fuck about Dameika. Nobody came when I called, you know that? Nobody did... fuckin’ forensics, or nothing.” She belched, and Twinkie crumbs sprayed the table. “Now I got *them* on me. For talking.”

Montez stepped forward. We exchanged a look—this was the first time we’d even heard of a suspect, or group of suspects. “Dana. Who is ‘them’? Who took Dameika?”

She shook her head. Lips stained with white sugary filling, she looked like she’d put it on instead of lipstick by mistake. “I can’t talk ‘bout it. They’ll get me too.” She pointed at the pile of Twinkie wrappers. “It already started for me. Only gonna get worse.”

The stench of rat-shit in the room was making my head swim. I wanted a drink, desperately. “Dana. What’s getting worse? Why can’t you tell us about... these people?” When she shook her head again, I tried some basic deduction. “If someone’s threatening you, we could put you in protective custody.”

She laughed, sniffing. “Protective custody ain’t gonna keep me from getting bigger, Detective. Das’ how they get to you—once you fat enough, you start seeing things *their* way. And they already put th’ mark on my door.” And she unwrapped another Twinkie, staring straight ahead at the TV. “Might ‘s well accept it. At least when they take me, I ain’t gotta put out no more.”

Footsteps, behind us. A deep male voice. “Dana! You dumb bitch. Th’fuck I tell you about eating like that?”

We turned to see a large, muscular black guy in the door. He was the picture of a stereotype: wearing a long fur coat and rings, he wore shades even inside. He also had an Uzi strapped to his thigh. Instantly Montez and I were on high alert. The gun was likely un-registered—but if we booked him now, or tried to, all his girls would be out of work. Not to mention, Freddie looked like he’d be happy to blow us away if we tried anything.

He nodded at us. “The fuck these bitches doing in here?”

Dana whimpered. “Please, Freddie...”

“You talking to cops?” He put a hand on the Uzi. “I swear, if you are...”

“Calm down,” said Montez. Her hands were up, palms open, while mine were already on my hip holster. “We’re just friends. Just trying to help her through her... grieving. About Dameika.”

He grunted. “Yeah?”

“Yeah. And we’re done, now. She’s feeling a lot better. Isn’t that right, Dana?”

Dana hiccuped. Processed food-crumbs splattered down into her cleavage, along with saliva. I found myself drawn to that shadowy abyss between her breasts—it was a black pit of depravity that I longed to bury myself in, if I couldn’t get a drink instead. My mind wandered and I reminded myself a man with a *very* large gun was standing next to us. I cleared my throat.

“That’s right. And we’re going. Right, Dana?”

Dana nodded, catching on.

Freddie watched us, his eyes cool and dispassionate behind his shades. I could see him doing the numbers: two dead cops would bring heat on him, which he didn’t want. He was a pimp, not a hitman, and the cleanup process would be sloppy... too sloppy to easily cover up. “Hope you two got this slut to stop eatin’ like she do,” he said, smiling widely. “She a fat piece of shit, since Dameika gone. Ain’t that right, Dana?”

Dana snorted, crying, and nodded.

“What are you, Dana?”

“A... I’m just a fat piece of shit.” She was sobbing, now. “A stupid, fat piece of shit.”

“Thas’ right. And you work for *me*. Not the cops.” He was still smiling, and I had the urge to put a bullet through those perfectly arranged white teeth. Nobody treated women like that when I was around—half the point of becoming a cop in the first place was because I’d seen the violence girls like this dealt with on a daily basis. Someone had to stand up for them.

“You,” I said, putting two and two together. “You put these people onto your girls. Why? Was Dameika not pulling in enough johns? Was that it?”

The smile vanished. “Y’all best leave, now.”

“Dameika was fat too, wasn’t she?” I felt my cheeks burning with frustration. “You take a cut, of whatever their crazy operation is. You give them your fattest girls, and in exchange they give you... what? Money? Protection from rival pimps?”

He clicked the safety off on the Uzi. I wanted to tell him that was a bad idea, that bumping the trigger of a shoddy machine-gun shoved down your jeans would get your dick blown off. But he deserved that, so I said nothing. “Go,” he said, pointing at the door. “Before I decide Dana here got too many friends.”

We left. What else could we do? An arrest would be messy, there would have been live-fire... and not to mention, Freddie was small fry compared to the people actually *doing* the kidnappings. We needed to gun for big fish, not little ones. I stopped outside to lean on the wall, hyperventilating.

Montez squeezed my shoulder. Our tension was dissipating, but I still felt the desire to hug her, to hold her close. This job was *shit*, and either one of us could get blown away any moment. And Montez had a tight, disciplined body that I wanted to hold—I wanted that comfort, stupid as it was.

*A raging lesbian alcoholic. Why the fuck did I join the force? I should be doing lines in a strip club somewhere, creep that I am. Jesus, this is stupid. Why do I stick with this job?*

Because it was the right thing to do. That was the problem with me: I might be a former addict and pervert, but I still couldn’t resist the call of justice. That stupid, idiotic heroine-complex in me made

me hit the streets and round up perps even when those perps would be happy to kill the first cop that shoved her nose into bad business.

“We’re one step closer,” Montez said. “Stay with me, Randi. We can do this.”

I shook my head. “Dana said they’re compelling her, somehow. Making her eat. What the hell was she talking about?”

“No idea. But we have to focus on hard evidence.” She nodded at the building. “I’m thinking a stakeout. If Freddie’s pals are coming to do another kidnapping, we might be able to grab one of them. Get a confession.”

I considered it. Not a bad idea—but there were other leads to chase. That sign on the door, for instance. We’d never seen that before. “Let’s talk it over. Preferably at a bar—I’m fucking thirsty.”

She glanced at me. “Aren’t you…”

“Recovering, yeah. But I can afford to wet my whistle once in a while. I’m under control.” Well, mostly. There was still a flask in my desk, back at the precinct. Several flasks.

We had another choice ahead of us. Whichever way we turned, things were going to get rough.



#### **THE CULT - PART 4**

*Taken from the statements of Randy Carter, police detective.*

*(Story by Z.O.B. Industries)*

*“From our swollen bodies,  
Our matron goddess grows,  
Fed on mankind’s poisons,  
Her flesh, it flows and flows...”*

I jerked awake with strange phrases in my mind. Some sort of poem? A song, perhaps? The piping flutes of an unseen musician echoed in my head as I struggled from sleep.

I was hung over. That much, I knew. I’d started drinking again last night and hadn’t been able to stop--fell off the wagon, *hard*. I dimly remembered masturbating to VHS workout tapes, flicking my bean viciously as the Spandex-clad woman in knee-high socks danced across the screen. And yet there was some desire in me, some unfulfilled need to see more of her... To see her body grow, and change... Maybe *that* had been the nightmare. It certainly sounded like one, now that I was awake.



Sitting in the squad car with Clarita. That's where I was. It took a moment to center myself in reality, the foggy mess of my dream sucking at my thoughts. There was a takeout container resting on my stomach--McDonald's, the cop's best friend. Their food was easy to store, never seemed to rot or go stale, and was easy to chow through on a stakeout.

*The trailer park.* That's where we were. It was midnight, the calls of strange birds echoing through the dark around us. Clarita had rolled the windows down a crack, but she didn't dare roll them down too far or the mosquitoes would get us. As a result, the smell of two frumpy, unkempt women crammed into pantsuits filled the car with a soft stink. The smell of decay under a slowly disintegrating deodorant shield.

*God, we can't go on like this.* We needed to crack this case--and soon. It was fucking with us, fucking with our heads... and our waistlines. Sleepless nights and constant work had made me puffy and swollen, my belt digging into my stomach. Clarita wasn't faring much better; I could see a ripped seam in the ass of her pants, probably put there by all the damn fast food we'd been forced to eat on duty. Her eyes were distant, staring.

And she had that goddamn statue in her hand.

I snatched it away from her, and it was like she'd woken from a dream. Her wide, brown eyes locked with mine and I pinched her shoulder. "Goddamn it. That thing should be in the evidence locker. Why do you have it out here?" Fury burned through my hangover, bit by bit.

"I..." She swallowed, and I saw a chunk of McDonald's fry stuck in her teeth. She was disoriented, sleepy, the cheap coffee sitting on our dashboard doing nothing to help. "I thought it might be useful. To prompt... the witness."

"Jesus." I hurled the thing into the back, where its ample stone hips clacked off the rear windshield. "Stop fucking around with that thing. It's giving me the creeps."

Suddenly, movement came from the trailer park, and I pointed. "There. There's our person of interest."

Shanay Daniels was a black girl, maybe five-foot-ten. She lived in a trailer with her mother, on the fringes of society out here in the sticks. The trailer park sat on the border of what had once been a solid black community--real houses, roofs that didn't leak, entertainments other than drunken sex and a fuzzy TV. But then the freeway had come through, a concrete barrier slicing the community in half. Constant noise and disturbance at night, from the cars.

Bit by bit, the community had fallen apart. Now it was a shadow of its former self, a shell. Shanay and her family lived in that shell, subsisting on whatever processed crap they could buy at the local 7-11 and sticking to government food stamps because jobs were a distant memory, out here. I couldn't help but wonder why the state government had put the freeway in that *exact* spot, when they could have diverted it around the town. Seemed a bit deliberate, to me. Seemed a bit like discrimination.

"Come on." My partner unclipped her seatbelt and emerged from the car, her back cracking. I did the same and stretched under the moonlight, my head pounding and my stomach oozing out from under my shirt. Pulling it down with a spurt of shame, I marched towards the trailer. Shanay had already gone inside.

We rolled up to the door... and I paused. In the window, where you'd expect some kitschy charms or a wind chime to be, there was a sign. The sign said "Jesus Saves."

I looked around at the rusting trailer, the dead lawnmower by the stairs, the beaten-up van the Daniels family used for transport. *Does He?* I thought. *Does He really, when you're broke as shit and stuck in a place like this? What exactly does He save--your dignity? Seems like these people had theirs torn away long ago.*

I knocked on the door. Shanay opened it a crack.

"Police," I said, flashing my badge. "Let us in, Shanay, or we'll let *ourselves* in."

What? Don't look at me like that. It was late, and I was tired and bloated and gassy, and full of McDonald's and the remains of my liquor dinner the previous night. It's not my fault.

But she closed the door, and we were left standing out there like idiots.

Clarita sighed. "Should we break it down?"

"No. We need the witness compliant. She's our last real lead--if we scare her off, we're fucked." I knocked on the door again... loudly, this time.

A voice from within, scratchy and rural, said "Go away. We don't want no cops here!"

"Well, you've got one," I said, shrugging. "Deal with it."

Clarita elbowed past me. "We're not here to make any arrests. We just want a few questions answered."

I dropped the mother lode. "It's about your sister."

A long, pregnant pause ensued. Eventually Shanay opened the door again. Her wide, frightened eyes regarded us. From her silhouette in the doorway I could see she was quite overweight, if not obese... the pattern continued, from one crime scene to another. "What you know about her?"

"We know she was taken," said Carlita. Her exotic features were stern and patient under the porch-light. "We know others were taken, just like her. We're trying to find them."

More silence. And then the door opened, and we were invited inside.

The first thing that hit me was the smell. It smelled like sweat in here--sweat, and unwashed flesh. I knew the scent well because when I'd been a flabby teenager eating my feelings, my room had been *filled* with that smell. I'd revelled in it, luxuriated in it, because that smell meant no one would ever come into my food-filled sanctum. Not even my parents. God, I'd been such a gross little piglet. Thank Christ I'd finally grown up a little at the academy... though replacing food with booze had not turned out to be a great idea.

Shanay walked ahead of us, leading us down a cramped hallway into what you might call a "living room" if you were generous. She was a big girl, all of it stored in her ass, with no tits to speak of. I

admit, I did watch her colossal rear shimmy inside her sweatpants, though she couldn't have been older than nineteen.

Don't judge me--it was a long shift, and I hadn't been with anyone in weeks. Most of my usual gay bars were currently shut down for "health code violations," which was the state's way of reminding us filthy lesbos that we couldn't have fun without their watchful eye upon us. Whatever--fuck 'em. As long as my sexual orientation remained a secret, I could just find another one.

Anyway, the kinky-haired girl jiggled into the living room, and this is where the smell went from an undercurrent to a full-blown *cloud* of stink. The reason why was obvious: her mother, Mrs. Daniels, took up the entire couch.

Mama Daniels was easily five hundred pounds. And all of it the saggy, depressed, folding-in-on-itself fat of a classically sedentary person. She was clad in a colossal pink nightgown with red hearts and her hair was done up in a bun. Her cheeks nearly sagged onto her chest, so heavy were her big brown jowls, and her eyes blinked piggishly at us from beneath a beetle-brow forehead.

People like this have gotten more and more common here, since the seventies. I don't know if it's in the water or what, but our state has slipped into frightening level of obesity. My suspicion is that the lack of jobs combined with food stamps and terrible, awful dietary choices has corralled people into being blobs like this. Still, it's no less disgusting each time you see it.

"Mama? These women are... with the police."

Shanay stood nervously behind her mom, wringing her chubby hands. I could see round scars on her cheek: cigarette burns. She'd been abused, possibly by her father, since the mother didn't look as if she could even lift an arm to do the abusing. She was simply too grossly massive to be dangerous.

"Whadda they want?" Mrs. Daniels reached into a plastic jar of cheese-balls that she'd nestled between her fat and the couch, filling her face with cheddar-balls as she spoke. *Crunch, crunch*. God, she was a sight. I thought privately that our kidnapper might have stolen her too, if it weren't for the fact she was so immense you'd need a goddamn forklift.

“We’re looking for your daughter. Rebecca Daniels.”

“Becca? We ain’t seen her in weeks.” The mass of brown flesh on the couch jiggled, belched and fell silent. On their shimmering TV screen, Bill Cosby explained the benefits of healthy eating to a bunch of cartoon children. I suspected the message hadn’t stuck with Mrs. Daniels.

“We know. We were wondering if you had any clues to her whereabouts...”

“Clues...” The enormous woman snorted. “Yeah, I’ll give y’all a clue. She were runnin’ around with some boy, like a *scarlet woman*. **Urrrp.**”

I frowned. Scarlet woman was a biblical term--a reference to the Whore of Babylon from Revelations, who was rumored to dress in scarlet and ride many-headed beasts. It was no surprise that Jesus occupied this woman’s brain as well as her window. If only the Bible had given her some dietary advice... “Well, I’m sorry about that. But could you describe this ‘boy’ for us? We’d really appreciate the help.”

Mrs. Daniels wiped a crusty sheen of cheese-dust off her lips with the back of her hand. The rest of her body was stained and splattered with crumbs, but her hands were immaculate, the nails painted cherry-red. “Don’t think so. Just some cracker from Cornucopia. I ain’t got time fer this--my shows is on.”

Clarita glanced at me, helpless. It was clear this woman was a dead end, mentally as well as physically. She was so deeply entrenched in this “lifestyle” that even threats of arrest or violence probably wouldn’t reach her. Besides, how would we even arrest her? We’d have to knock a wall down just to get her out of here, and that didn’t even get into how thick her flabby wrists were. No handcuffs I’d ever seen would fit around those rolls.

Then, like a miracle, we were pulled from the cheesy jaws of ignorance. Shanay stood in the filthy kitchenette, beckoning to us. “Clarita, can you get a full witness statement?” I said, nodding at the girl. “Seems like there’s a little more to work on here.”

As she departed for the greasy, messy corner where the Daniels kept their microwave and decrepit fridge, I turned back to Mrs. Daniels. “Look, this would be easier if you would...”

But something stopped me, a revulsion sweeping through my body with the speed of instinct. There was a yellow, slick substance leaking from the corners of the woman’s eyes... something slippery, and fleshy, and pale. With no effort at all, some reflexive piece of knowledge rose in me.

*Lard. She’s weeping lard.*

**“The Black Goat’s daughters will devour the world,”** said Mrs. Daniels, her voice seeming to come from a place much deeper and more unctuous than her own throat. **“Fed on offal, breeding in the dark, they will rut and glut until the stars go out and mankind is buried in flesh... Buried alive...”**

My hand went for my gun. In that moment, the TV flickered to darkness, the feed interrupted somewhere. It was the only source of light in the room, and when it pulsed back on again, Mrs. Daniels was the same motionless puddle of fat she’d always been. Mindlessly eating cheese-balls, she stared straight ahead, disinterested in me.

*I must be going crazy.*

It seemed like the logical assumption. And yet... Something seemed to make sense about her unholy babblings. I’d heard something similar from Clarita, the other day. Was there a mass hysteria going on? The dripping lard I couldn’t explain--maybe it was a hallucination from my hangover meds. Or maybe I was just losing my mind.

Hushed murmurs rose from the kitchenette, and Clarita reported back to me, motioning at the door. “We’ve got what we need--a full description of the kidnapper, plus a vehicle make and model. We need to move.”

“Can’t we just call back to the precinct?” I followed her to the door, rubbing my eyes. “I could... really use some sleep.”

“Me too. But this is important.” She showed me a primitive sketch she’d made on her notepad. It was pretty good--Clarita could have been a profile artist, if she wasn’t so hellbent on climbing the ranks of the law. The face she’d drawn was skinny, with tall cheekbones and a mop of hair. “I know this guy. Jack Clements--he runs a local orchard. More of a commune, really. He works the trees with a bunch of hippie friends of his.”

My blood began to warm with excitement at last. A suspect--a real goddamn suspect. And to think that his description had been with Shanay the whole damn time. We’d been hunting snipe, while the kidnapper continued to do his dirty work. “Okay. Let’s get some coffee and go arrest the jackass.”

“It’s not that easy. Randi, this guy’s dad works for the state. He’s the district attorney.”

My jaw flopped open. I had known that name from somewhere, but couldn’t place it. Now the case had grown exponentially more difficult--if we collared the DA’s son, there was no telling what kind of heat he would put on the department. “We’re going to need an airtight case. Hard evidence. No way is this guy going to jail if his dad can help it.”

“Exactly. But the longer we wait, the more girls get taken.” Clarita shuddered. “Randy... This whole thing feels wrong. If Clements has been taking these women, where is he keeping them? What the hell is he *doing* with them?”

“I’ve got some ideas about that.” Unpleasant, squirming ideas, chasing at the corners of my consciousness. But before we could prove my hunch, we needed evidence on Clements. “Okay. We’re going to have to B&E on his compound--there’s no time for a warrant.”

She grunted. “The DA’s going to have our asses if we break and enter without justification.”

“For fuck’s sake, who *cares*?” We were standing on the porch now, the muddy Mississippi night all around us. The shadows seemed to hang right over my head, outside the tiny circle of light from the porch bulb. “Rita, he’s *using* these girls for something. Some kind of... fucked-up cult thing. I don’t know what it is, but if we hesitate even a second, it’s all going to get worse. We need to hurry.”

She sighed. And something flickered across her face--some kind of suspicion. Did she smell booze on my breath? Or was it something else? I couldn't be sure. Adjusting her bra, she clicked the safety off on her sidearm. "Okay. We'll go now. You drive, though--I need to sleep." She shook her head. "We could have a problem when we get there, though."

"What is it?"

"Kidnapping victims have a tendency to gravitate towards their kidnapers over time. Stockholm Syndrome." She glanced towards the back of the car, where the statue lay in the backseat. "What if they don't want to come back? What if they provide armed resistance?"

I snorted. "From the descriptions of the victims, they're all a bit too... large for fighting."

"Joke all you want. But I don't think you could shoot one of them, if you came down to it." She eyed me. "Could you?"

I opened my mouth for one of my classic retorts... but it fell flat. She was right--I couldn't shoot those girls in cold blood, not even if they'd been organized into some sort of obese militia. Or at least, I hoped I couldn't do it. I didn't want to find out the answer.

"Come on," I said. "Longer we stand here bitching, the longer it takes us to catch this asshole. Let's get our evidence off his farm and then call in to the precinct for backup."

Of course, this would probably be easier said than done. We'd have to pick a strategy for the B&E, and hopefully bring back one of the captives for proof.

And even if we *did* succeed, we'd probably be hauled in front of a judge for some minor violation or other. But I didn't care.

It was time to get answers.





## THE CULT - PART 5

We debated our next step for a long time. Eventually, it grew dark, and the flask of Jameson's in my pocket grew light. I kept sneaking out of the police station to smoke, the glow of my cigarette flaring in the hot Louisiana night. I could have used something stronger than nicotine--maybe a joint, or a big fat roach, or even a little Ecstasy. But I was still on the clock... still on the clock, and I needed to put on a good face for Clarita.

The truth was, though... I was falling apart.

We'd been on this case for weeks. We had our suspect, had our location, but it all felt too good to be true. Like the universe was taunting us, somehow. Weeks of nothing and then suddenly a suspect appears out of nowhere? Gimme a break. The universe isn't that kind. Something was wrong.

I craned my neck to stare up at the stars. They were half-hidden under the city glow from New Orleans, a bright wash of orange that lit the skies. But some stars were still visible. To my exhausted,

sleep-deprived baggy eyes, the constellations seemed to form into the shape of an hourglass... the shape of the statue, sitting in the back of our unmarked cruiser.

*The black goat's young will drown the world in flesh.*

I'd seen things on this case that made me question my sanity. Made me feel like I was disintegrating, like the case itself was pulling me apart piece by piece. I was losing myself to this case: I hadn't slept properly in days, I was surviving off nothing but coffee and McDonald's. And whiskey.

Clarita must have known my drinking habit was back, but she didn't say anything. Why would she? She had just as many naughty little habits as I did. I'd seen her devouring a few Ho-Ho's this morning, and a Little Debbie cake before lunch. She was sliding into a similar hunter-gatherer state of mind that I was: she would eat anything, like a cockroach, to survive this case. To make the fear go away.

Because whatever we were dealing with... it wasn't entirely natural. I felt that in my bones. The people who had kidnapped these girls weren't messing around--they'd left very little trace other than the statues, and the witnesses had all been uncooperative or simply too distracted by grief, gluttony or stupidity to help us.

But beyond the witnesses... something else lurked in the dark. Some massive and terrible force, I felt, was gathering its strength. Through my whiskey-laced mental fog and the uncomfortable churn of a super-sized Big Mac inside my guts, I felt the approach of something awful. Something inhuman.

I got little instincts like these, from time to time. But it got worse when I drank. And I was drinking a lot.

Lifting the flask to my lips, I sucked down another shot of whiskey, burping softly as the acrid liquid burned its way down my throat. Without booze, my mind moved too quickly, too aggressively. Burned through leads and suspects, motives and possibilities. I needed to slow it down... I needed to soften my brain, soothe it, soak it in booze until I was drunk enough to understand the insane logic of this kidnapper.

Of course, my little habit wasn't helping me lose weight. Whiskey is not known for its low-calorie diet usefulness, and neither are Big Macs. Glancing down at my stomach, I was disappointed to see my white button-down was straining at the seams. A gap in my overstrained top displayed the black lace of my bra, and the additional flesh recently arrived on my waist made the Louisiana heat feel oppressive, almost painful. I was sweating like a pig after just a few minutes outside, my armpits soaked, gas bubbling in my guts.

I felt pathetic... humiliated. An overtired, gassy pig. And that's when it hit me.

*Of course, I thought. It's a power thing. He kidnaps fat girls because they're easy to overpower--their muscles atrophied, their bodies heavy and slow. And if they're not fat... he MAKES them fat. It's an act of dominion.*

Relief coursed through me. I was no longer chasing some sort of shadowy monster--we were dealing with a real human. I grinned drunkenly, covering my mouth as a small "**urrrrp**" broke out of it. Whiskey always made me gassy. Hell, almost *anything* made me gassy, this close to forty--I had to diet constantly just to avoid being the designated office fart-machine.

"Randi? You okay?"

Carlita was leaning out the back door of the precinct, a pack of gum in her hand. I blinked slowly, trying to appear as sober as possible.

"Yeah. I'm... **urrrp**, I'm fine. 'Scuze me."

"You're drinking." She emerged onto the back lot, closing the door. God, she was beautiful. Maybe it was the liquor, but Carlita looked gorgeous tonight--she had little shell earrings on and her hair was swept back in a very avant-garde, New York kind of way. I had the urge to make a pass at her... but let it go. We had enough problems without me trying to get busy with my partner.

Not that I *really* wanted to get busy with her. It was just... You know. A few thoughts.

“*Urrphft.*” I covered my mouth with one hand. “Maybe. Just... just a few nips before we get after this bastard. *Hic.*”

She scowled at me, then sighed and pulled a cigarette from my back pocket, tucking away her pack of gum.

“Fuck it. If you’re going to drink, I’m gonna smoke. We might as well fall off the wagon at the same time.”

“That’s the spirit.” We stood on the cracked, damp cement for a while, each nursing our respective addictions. Finally, Clarita spoke.

“This isn’t a normal case, is it?”

“Nah.” I screwed the cap back onto my flask, staring at the constellations. They seemed to move and twitch as I watched... undulating like a snake, or perhaps a woman’s hips.

*Femininity is a cosmic glutton...* What did it mean? And why had the words resonated so strongly with me, as if I’d been *eager* to hear them, waiting to hear them all my life? The uncertainty made me queasy... or perhaps that was just the fast food. Either way, it felt horrible.

“He’s overfeeding his victims. Abducting them with no trace, and no apparent motive...” Clarita shook her head, staring at the clouds. “Why? None of it makes sense. He’s probably a pervert, but to do a kidnapping job on this scale... It smacks of human trafficking. It’s not average pervert procedure to risk so much exposure.”

“I’ve got an idea about that.” I explained my idea to her--the idea of the kidnapper desiring control, complete control of his victims. By the end, she was nodding. “Okay. I guess that makes sense... He’s probably keeping them locked up somewhere, then. As sex slaves. God, I hate men.”

“Join the club.” Out of all the cases I’d worked, the rape cases were the worst. Men were... bizarre, when it came to sex. Half of them I admired for their dedication to perversion, and half of them I just wanted to strangle with my bare hands. I’d fucked a few men before I embraced my other side, the

whispering sapphic side that begged me to kiss Clarita even now. All those men had been... strange. Peculiar in some way. Much like me: touched in the head.

Something about this world, I thought, twists people's minds into pretzels. Something makes them like this... something churns them out, aggressive, horny and sad.

This guy was just another sad example of that.

But try as I might, I couldn't convince myself that this was the only explanation for what was going on. I had seen too much--the eerie statues, the flickering lights, that terrible voice that I'd heard in the trailer park. Something else was going on here. Something unholy squirmed under the surface of this case... something monstrous.

I took another drink.

Carlita raised an eyebrow. "You keep hitting the juice like that, we won't be able to knock on the District Attorney's door tonight."

I nearly spat out the remains of my liquor. "*That's* where you want to hit him?"

"Why not? The son is a real estate guy--he's got properties all over town. But he still lives with his dad, oddly enough. And the majority of serial killers operate out of their own houses..."

I frowned. "We haven't found a single body. Nothing suggests he's killing them."

"Then why hasn't anyone seen anything? Heard anything? Kidnapping victims need food, clothing, supplies. If the DA's house suddenly got five more guests, someone would notice..."

"Not if this Jack Clements guy is smart. Careful." I thought again of the orchard he owned upstate--it was a quiet place, orange groves and such. At least according to his file. "Oh my god... Wait a second."

"What is it?"

“Orange groves require tons of fertilizer. And water. And storage sheds.” Things were starting to come together in my mind. “It would be easy to hide victims there. Stash them in cellars...”

Her jaw stiffened. “We don’t have a warrant for the grove, Randi.”

I swallowed. My throat was scratchy and warm from the whiskey. “I know. But we’d have a hard time getting one for the DA’s house anyway. I say we hit the groves. Just scope them out--no trespassing.”

She thought about it for a while, the glow of her cigarette lighting her face. She was looking just as puffy and exhausted as I was. I saw now why she’d been getting so paunchy--she’d been trying to quit smoking. It explained her small pot-gut and chubbier cheeks... and the gradual expansion of her ass, which I’d been trying to ignore for quite some time.

Eventually, we agreed to hit the groves.

Hours later, cloaked under darkness, our cruiser growled past shadowy trees, the buzzing of insects all around us. Upstate Louisiana has always been a wilderness, and it hasn’t changed much in the last hundred years. Towering cement interstate bridges loom over the swamps, sure, and the occasional chain restaurant dwells in the darkness. But for the most part... only Christianity, alligators, and Cajuns reigned up here. The great nation of America was mostly unknown, in the most rural corners of the state.

All the same, we’d been able to hit the fast food joints on the way up. I had a belly full of Taco Bell and a pocket full of vodka nips, my vision swimming and my patience growing thin.

“Are we... *urrrp*, there yet?”

“Yes. Can you cover your mouth, please? You’re stinking up the car.”

“Oh, that was me? Sorry, I thought it was *you*, with your constant gas.”

Clarita gritted her teeth, her brown face lit only by the dashboard lights. “I wasn’t the one who suggested we stop by Taco Bell... Ugh, their beef *never* agrees with me.”

***FRRRRapppt.*** I snickered and held my nose in mock distress as Clarita squirmed, clearly in discomfort. I felt bad for her... but I liked watching her wiggle.

“It agrees with me just fine. *Urrapp.*” I covered my mouth, and winced as the back-waft from my own belch reached my nose. Clarita was right--I *did* stink. Between the gas and the body-odor from being stuck on this case for over a week, I smelled like the poster-girl for a new brand of “gross bachelorette” perfume.

Ah, well. At least Clarita was suffering along with me. And in a way, the stench strengthened our bond as partners. We both understood what was necessary to close cases like this--the long nights, the endless hours of boredom, waiting for a suspect to be sighted on a stake-out or for local authorities to comply with a warrant. And she knew that being a detective didn’t necessarily make for a healthy waistline.

Which was... convenient, right now. My stomach pressed painfully against my waistband and, when Clarita wasn’t looking, I unbuckled my belt and grunted with almost masculine pleasure as the swollen flesh there surged out a few more inches.

*Fuck, this case is making me fat. Why doesn’t that worry me? That should worry me.* I took a nip of vodka and stared out the window, watching wildlife scurry and then freeze in the darkness as our headlights passed.

“Do you think they enjoy it?” Clarita said.

I blinked, still fairly drunk. “Whuh?”

“The girls. The ones Jack kidnapped. Do you think they enjoyed being... courted, by him? All that free food. The affection, despite their size. Do you think it was... fun?”

I scowled. “What are you talking about?”

She walked it back right away. “I’m just... trying to identify with the victim’s thought processes, that’s all.” She winced as her belly gurgled, her disheveled work clothes shifting as she raised one sizeable Hispanic asscheek. “Ugh. Here comes another one. You may want to roll down the windows...”

She was right--but I was too slow, fumbling with the window-crank. She let off a stinkbomb inside the car, like nothing I’d ever smelled, absolutely rancid and warm and fogging the windows with its stink.

“*Jesus!* Carlita, you need to see a doctor!”

She stared dead ahead, trying to remain focused. “Serves you right for burping in my face like that...”

“Oh, so now we’re using gas as a weapon? Grow up.” But I made sure to hold in my next belch until it was *really* smelly, before letting it out as loud as I could.

We arrived at the orchards around three in the morning. By then, I was good and sloshed, but I did my best to remain professional. The reeking interior of our car was a prison I was only too happy to escape from.

We turned the headlights off as we approached, pulled over to the side of the road and killed the engine. Up ahead, I could see an old plantation house through the gloom--white pillars, Washington-style lintels and windows. Stumbling out of the car, I burped into my sleeve and began waddling away from the car.

“Where are you going?”

“Take a piss.” I stumbled over the driveway’s muddy gravel in the dark, cursing. “Been riding for hours. Need a... need a piss.” I quickly found a secluded spot beside the road, hid myself behind a tree, and squatted. Luckily, the local wildlife left me alone as I did my business... except for the mosquitoes. In Louisiana, the mosquitoes never leave you alone.



“Gross.” Carlita examined the house through the gloom. “Only one light on. Looks like there’s a... Farmhouse or something, out by the clearing where he’s got the trees.”

“We’ll check there first.” I pulled up my pants, and standing up, almost knocked my head on something. When I saw what it was, I felt a chill pass down my spine.

Statues. Dozens of them, dangling from the trees and caged in little nets of wicker and reeds. They were big-hipped, featureless, obese feminine figures, just like the ones we’d found at the crime scenes.

“Holy shit.” I stumbled away from them, pulling on Carlita’s shoulder and pointing. “Our buddy’s got quite the uh, taste in yard decorations...”

“My God.” Her jaw dropped. “We... We need to get pictures of these, as evidence. You check out the farmhouse, I’ll get the evidence camera. This... This could be a smoking gun. Even if we can’t find the girls, *this* might sway a jury.”

“Yeah. Or he’ll buy them off, just like his family’s bought off everyone *else* in this state.” Jack’s family was famous for their corruption--it was said the D.A. would take money, favors, or even sex in payment, if you wanted to bend his ear. We’d never been able to prove it, but everyone knew the family was dirty. It was practically a tradition.

She sighed. “Either way... We *need* this. Go--I’ll handle tagging and bagging this shit.”

I grinned and stole off into the night, hand on the butt of my sidearm. It was slow going at first, but Jack’s front lawn was nicely kept and the evening was cool and dry, with a trace of humidity. I quickly passed the big house and entered the backyard.

There, ahead... the farmhouse. Now *this* seemed to be where the party was at. Several lights were on, and I could hear the whir of a generator inside. Our boy Jack was very busy, apparently.

*Hope he’s just woodworking, or something. Otherwise...* I drew my gun.

*Otherwise, he's going downtown with us. And he better go quietly.*

The farmhouse porch was covered in those same little figurines... the ones that decked the lawn and the orchard. Eerie, round-hipped little female figures, tied together from rags and twine and twigs.

A while ago, there had been a panic about Satanists in Louisiana. People from out of town had seen some *voudun* decorations hanging in the French Quarter of New Orleans, and instead of taking it as another sign of a vibrant and often decadent city, they'd run screaming home to their local newspapers and started the flames of a panic. That had been a rough year for my department. A real drinking year, for me.

But this was different. There were no *loa* symbols here, no engravings of Papa Legbo or any of the other popular spirits of coastal ritual. This... this was something older, weirder. The place... I'm not sure how to describe it.

The place felt *paleolithic*. It had the feel of an ancient cave decked with sacrificial offerings, except instead of a cave, it was an innocent-looking white farmhouse with a screen door and a porch covered in guttering candles.

I avoided the front porch entirely. Going in through the front was stupid at best, dangerous at worst. For all I knew, our buddy Jack Clements might be right behind the front door, waiting with a twelve-gauge shotgun. And I wasn't exactly in the "condition" to be dodging shotgun blasts. My stomach was straining painfully against my waistband, still swollen and bloated from my feast earlier... and the liquor I'd been sneaking every few minutes, on the way here.

Yeah, I was a little drunk. But sometimes, you have to be a little drunk to keep your sanity. Right now, all I wanted to do was bust down the door, go in guns-a-blazing, and kick Jack's kidnapping ass. But that wouldn't be a good move. For one thing, we had to consider these girls hostages--and opening a hostage negotiation violently was a great way to get people killed, real quick.

So instead, I circled the building, looking for a weak point. There was music playing from a record player... somewhere on the upper floor. An old Zapp & Roger tune, from the

seventies--synthesized funk. I even recognized the song: "*More Bounce to the Ounce.*" I remembered it from my uncle's old LP collection.

*I've got a lot of bounce to MY ounces, tonight...* Huffing and puffing, sweating into my plainclothes as I jiggled around the back of the house, I promised myself I would start dieting when we got back.

*What's the point, though, my negative side shot back. Clarita will never be 'into' you. You're her co-worker... and worse, a smelly drunk. Nobody likes a smelly drunk.*

Well, maybe I would clean up when I got back. Or maybe I would fall into a bottle of Jack's and not come out for a few weeks. Either way, it didn't change the fact that I had a job to do, here.

I found the cellar door pretty quickly. It was an unusual addition--Louisiana houses rarely had basements, due to the soggy nature of the local soil. But Jack's farmhouse and orchard were on the top of a small incline, just high enough to avoid any residual flooding from the swamps. He could afford such luxuries.

Notably, the basement hatch was chained shut. I pulled out my small flashlight, and held it in my teeth, pulling a bobby-pin from my hair. Contrary to popular belief, bobby pins were a piss-poor lock picking tool... but it was all I had to work with. That, and the pen-knife in my pocket, digging uncomfortably into my plump thigh.

Between the two, however, I finally got the simple padlock to give. It was rusty, as if it had been out in the elements for a long time... maybe years. I hoped and prayed that I wouldn't find any bodies, down there. If I did, my lunch of junk food would probably come right back up again. I was too tired, too depressed and too drunk to hold it down.

I opened the hatch with a laborous tugging, and barely managed to catch it before it slammed against the concrete foundation of the house. Shining the flashlight down below, I could see more candle-light... but not much else, aside from the concrete stairs.

*Alright... Here goes.* I swallowed, and took a nip from my flask for some courage. My vision was getting blurry... but it would be worth it. I could do this. I was a badass, a force to be reckoned with.

A soft *p'toot* escaped my rear, as I took the first step down into the basement. *Shit! I hope no one heard that...*

As I descended the stairs I noticed the walls were covered in strange carvings. Luminous paint, glowing with some kind of phosphorescent pigment, showed primitive and yet elegant depictions of large women... faceless, like that Venus of Willendorf thing I'd seen in a museum once. Faceless, like the statues that we kept finding at the crime scenes.

Most of them seemed to be eating. A few were having sex, with equally faceless men... and sometimes women. All were nude.

I could hear chanting from the basement. The candle-light grew stronger, guttering flames lighting my way... I stepped into the room and drew my gun, with no idea what I might find.

I wasn't prepared for what I saw.

The chanting was coming from a stereo in the corner. The room smelled of unwashed flesh, incense, and a sort of *musk* that made my nose scrunch up in distaste. The walls were decked with the same kind of strange, Paleolithic drawings... in the same glowing paint. There were symbols on the floor, around a strange ring of greenish glass, where the symbols spiralled together in a dizzying ring.

Around the ring lay the missing girls we'd been sent here to find.

But... they were *different*. The women we'd been sent to find were heavy, but these girls were... *colossal*. I recognized them only barely, in the dim suggestions of their facial features in the light of the red candles... their faces were buried under so much blubber, it was at first hard for me to confirm they were even human.

There was Georgette DuBois, her pale flesh spilling over the edges of a reinforced bed. Her once-plump frame had ballooned to a nearly incomprehensible, indiscriminate mass of meat. She was

totally nude, more of those strange symbols scrawled on her belly and breasts. Her expression was vacant, completely slack-faced as she sucked.... *Something* out of a tube by her bed. It was a pale white liquid, the tube attached to a silver tank beside her.

I also saw Rebecca Daniels--the girl from the trailer park. She, too, was colossally fat, so obese I could hardly even identify her in the dim light. Her brown slabs of flesh oozed over the sides of an enormous recliner chair, her bloated feet just elephantine pillars of flesh with tiny toes sticking out. She was sucking from a similar tank, and moaning softly around the tube. Her eyes were glazed with delight and distant, lustful pleasure.

And then there was Dameika. Dameika was the most recent of the kidnapping victims, so it stood to sense she was smaller than the others... But unlike the first two, Dameika's dark flesh had an unhealthy, ashy pallour I didn't much like. She looked like she'd gained weight *fast*, stretch marks decking her sides, her face splattered with that pale-white substance. Her cheap earrings glinted in the dark as she looked towards me, seemingly still lucid enough to recognize another person. Unlike her 'friends.' But like them, she also had a tube in her mouth... and was sucking away, a little reluctantly, at it.

I rushed over to her and pulled the tube out of her mouth. It was in deep, the back of it nearly jammed down her throat. She coughed, belched, and wiggled in the simple bed she was strapped down to. "Urrrrppp... n-no... Leave me... You have to get out of here..."

"I'm not leaving anybody." I tugged on the restraints, but unlike the rest of this ramshackle, bizarro operation, the leather straps were very sturdy and bound by chains to the steel frame of the bed. "Come on. Help me get these off."

"It ain't no use," she groaned, the milk-like fluid dribbling out of the corners of her mouth. "He's got us... bound to him. By a spell. We're the chosen... daughters of the Black Goat. **Urrrp**. We... We have to eat. It's what we're *born* for." And to my shock, she reached for the hose again.

I pulled it away from her. "What are you doing? Don't..."

Then I heard the slightest shuffle behind me, a tiny scuffing across the concrete floor. I saw Dameika's glassy eyes shift, tracking the movement, and I spun around, swinging my flashlight--

But the intruder was too quick for me. A flash of movement, and then something crashed into my temple, knocking me to the ground, stars exploding in my vision.

Stupid... stupid. I had been just drunk enough to miss the tiny shadow, the change in the light from the candles, as someone snuck up behind me. And now I was paying for it.

As my consciousness faded, I felt someone dragging me out of the basement... and then blackness closed over my vision, squirming tentacles of shadow filling my thoughts and drowning them in greasy silence.

When I awoke, I was strapped to a chair. It was an antique, with elaborately glazed carvings of goats worked into it. The seat was cushioned, but the handcuffs around my wrists were anything but comfortable.

"Hello, Detective."

I was sitting at an antique dinner table in the farmhouse's dining hall, with Jack across from me--I recognized his sallow face, sunken eyes and sardonic grin from the newspaper clippings I'd collected, as part of the case. He was wearing a flannel shirt and jeans, splattered with dirt... and a dark-red stain I could only interpret as blood.

"You're awake. That's good. Now we can begin."

"Begin what?" My voice was a hoarse croak. I licked my lips--dry, and tasting of stale liquor. God, I needed a drink.

"Why, your true purpose, of course." His smile was a white gash across his face. "You tracked me this far... you must be quite committed. But I see the flaws inside you, Detective. The little cracks... Widening and widening. Threatening to swallow you whole."

I squeezed my eyes shut, trying to remember my hostage negotiation training. Except this time, *I* was the hostage. “You... knew we were after you?”

“Of course. Why do you think I left those trinkets, hanging from the trees? For their fashion appeal? I wanted you in the house. Where I could separate you... and deal with you.”

“And yet.. I got all the way into your ‘pig pen’ before you caught me.” I chuckled. “You’re not as smart as you think.”

“Smart enough to fool *you*.”

“Fuck you.” I spat at him. My aim was poor--the spit landed on the table. But he got the message. His slender fingers, laced together, clenched once... and relaxed. His gaze never wavered.

“I’ll tolerate this... rebellious streak of yours. Rebecca was the same way, before she saw the *truth*. Her destiny.” He took a delicate lace napkin from his pocket, and wiped my spit off the table. “She’s merely a receptacle for the divine. As are you.”

“Your face is gonna be the receptacle for a bullet, if you don’t let me out of here.” I licked my lips again--my mouth was drier than ever. “The rest of the precinct knows where I am. They’ll come for me. And Clarita--”

“Clarita’s in the basement now. She was very rebellious, when I caught her. She needed... *Reprogramming*.”

His eyes flashed, and for the first time I felt true fear. I knew how to deal with slimeballs, the kind of corrupt people his family produced. But this went deeper than corruption. This... this was insanity. Pure, undiluted madness. I had no idea how to deal with that.

Because you couldn’t negotiate with madness. You couldn’t reason with it. All you could do was try your best to put it down, before it hurt more people.

And from where I was sitting, it looked like Jack was *very* ready to hurt people.

“Reprogramming?” Maybe I could prompt him--tease his goals out of him. He certainly seemed talkative.

But then he fell silent, dabbing at a nonexistent stain on his shirt. He sighed... and finally, he raised his head. His expression was distant and sad. “Detective... You can waste your breath. You’re not going to get anything out of me. No confession, nothing you can take back to your cop friends. They’re all on my father’s payroll, anyway. By the time your tiny mind understands what we’re doing here... you’ll be just another hog in my herd. Another beautiful, swollen bag of flesh, ready to usher the goddess back into the world. The Black Goat--the beast with a thousand young.”

“I’ve... I’ve heard that name before. I... I heard Mrs. Daniels say it. What does it mean? What... what is it?” I had to keep him talking. Luckily, it seemed he had no problem doing so.

I watched as he rose, retrieved a bottle of wine from the cupboard, and poured himself a glass, with all the patience of a sommelier.

“You’ll see. Once you drink the nectar of the gods... you’ll see.” He sipped the wine, grimaced and sighed. “Hmm. A bit thin, for my taste. I like a more *full body* to my vintages.” He stared at the glass for a while, seeming to ponder its reddish depths.

“The nectar...”

“A little cocktail I came up with, using my chemistry degree. Mild hallucinogens and cannabinoids, mixed with an extremely high-calorie extract. Almost identical to lard, but doesn’t require all that messy slaughtering to get it.” He grinned. “The slaughtering will come later. Once the Black Goat returns.”

On the wall, where various old chatchkes and china pieces sat collecting dust, an egg timer went off. Its shrill buzz made me jump. Jack got up, switched it off, and came over to me, training a hand down my shoulder to rest it on my stomach. I shuddered in disgust. His hand was like a dead fish, all cold and clammy.



“You began accepting the Goddess into your life years ago... You just didn’t know it.” He patted my stomach, the excess flesh there jiggling. “All those long hours... all that hard work at the police precinct, paid back by sexism and cruelty from the assholes working there. It burned you... burned you badly. After your mother’s disappearance, you wanted nothing more than to dwell in the dark, and eat and eat... But you stuck it out. And you worked your way up to Detective. All to make the little whispering voice inside you go away...”

“You don’t know... Shit about me.” But I wasn’t so sure, now. Jack might be insane, but he’d obviously done his homework. After my mother disappeared I had gone into a deep depression--creating the fatter version of myself that I’d later worked so hard to destroy.

“Don’t I? You look thirsty, Detective... How about a drink?”

And suddenly, like magic, there was a wine bottle in his hand. But it was filled with something milky and thick... the same stuff from the basement.

“No! *No!*”

“It’s your destiny, Detective. To become one of the pigs whose sheer gluttony, sheer *mass*, beckons the Goddess back to us.” His eyes were inches from mine, his sallow face leering. “My family has been working to revive her for generations. Investing in fast food... destroying public transportation options... making people slower, fatter, stupider. But they’re still not fat *enough*. If we want the world to drown in flesh... we need to get more creative. That’s where I come in.”

And he pinched my nose, tilting my head back. My mouth was sealed shut, but immediately I felt the urge to gasp for air. I opened my lips just a fraction--

Jack shoved the open neck of the wine-bottle past my lips.

God help me, but the stuff tasted... *good*. It reminded me of eggnog, thick and creamy with a tiny cinnamon aftertaste. It hammered down my throat and into my stomach before I could react, my throat bulging as my eyes widened in terror.

I struggled to spit it out, and eventually managed to stop swallowing. Coughing, I spat the stuff out down my front, its whitish creamy droplets streaking my chest and stomach. But after drinking it I felt... so much more mellow. So much more relaxed. What had I been so angry about? Things weren't so bad. I was in the clutches of a madman, yes, but the cool liquid felt so good sloshing in my stomach...

*No!* I pushed back against the lazy, mellow thoughts, shoving them away. This was how Jack got you--with his little speeches, his little chemical cocktail. After he wore you down and you drank his special "serum," you would be happy to escape from your terror into the warm comfort of a bottle... an emotion I knew all too well.

The solution to my problem reached me just as he pinched my nose again. I would have to go undercover. I would have to pretend to surrender... so that I could later escape. It was the only way.

And so, praying for my soul and lamenting my poor waistline, I drank.

Soon my stomach was bulging, streaks of lard-substitute dribbling down my chin, my brain foggy and hazy with the CBD and sparkling with the microdose of LSD he'd no doubt snuck into the mixture. Perverts like Jack always enjoyed using intoxicants on their victims, to make them stupid and pliable... the problem here was that it was working. I actually *did* feel dumber, slower-witted, more vulnerable to his wheedling words as he whispered in my ear, his murmurs tugging at something vast and greedy inside me. A part of my personality I'd spent years suppressing: the glutton. The drunk. The worthless pleasure-hound who threatened to destroy my personal credibility and ruin my career... not to mention, split all my pants with her fat ass.

"Can you feel it, Randi? Your body answers to the Black Goat's call... her swollen fecundity calls to you from every cell, every taste bud. Your desires are Her desires. Your needs, Her needs."

He lifted the bottle to my lips again and I drank, belching around the liquid as my thoughts turned to a slurry of idiocy. "That's it... Accept Her into your life, and be saved. Be saved from diets, and exercise, and all the other wasteful, stupid things you've been taught. Find salvation in *gorging*."

And I did. For a few brief moments, I did. My eyes began to roll back and I felt the temptation to simply drink forever... to be nothing but a receptacle. An idiotic bag of flesh, no longer concerned about

silly things like *self-respect* and *fitness*. All those things floated away, my worldly concerns departing, replaced by the sweet nothingness of the Black Goat's mind. Greed, endless greed. And food, endless food... flowing in a perfect waterfall down my throat, guzzling, guzzling... **Gulp, gulp, gulp**... Endless. All-consuming.

But then a tiny spark lit inside my sodden, stupefying brain. It was the idea of Carlita, her safety, her sanctity. She was my friend--one of my only friends, after I'd thrown myself into work and alienated boyfriends and girlfriends until I was all alone. She'd always fought by my side, supported me. Hell, she'd smelled my *farts* and still enjoyed working with me. You didn't find a woman like that by accident. Fuck the Black Goat's destiny--I'd already found my own.

And so, deep inside my rapidly slipping mind, I found a handhold. Something to cling to, some way to keep sane despite the avalanche of strange sensations and forbidden pleasures. And I clung to it.

*Carlita.*

I clung to it even as Jack dragged me to the basement, and strapped me to a bed of my own, my arms and legs bound and my clothes stripped off. I clung to sanity even when he got out a vibrator and gently, lovingly taped it to my loins and set it to pulse at random, saying the Black Goat would be "pleased" by my sensual torment.

I held onto that sanity even when I saw a bedpan on the surgical table next to the bed, and understood with horror that Jack never intended me to leave this place. I was here to eat until I died, my soul fodder for the Black Goat's dark intentions. And so were the other girls: Georgette, Rebecca and Dameika. And Carlita. Poor, poor Carlita.

Whatever dose of brain-numbing chemicals Jack had put into my "food," he'd clearly doubled it for Carlita. She was slack-jawed and drooling, her pupils dilated, tied down in a leather recliner, stripped to her bra and panties. Her lovely caramel skin was distended, her belly already bulging with Jack's "ambrosia" to the point she looked ready to burst. Her elegant, curly black hair tumbled down her shoulders, some of it stained and matted with splattered lard-mix. Her eyes turned towards me at one point, and I felt a flicker of recognition pass between us... but then it was gone. Carlita's eyes went hazy

and she vanished into a feeding frenzy as Jack forced a tube into her mouth and the tanks, with their busy little electric motors, began funneling both of us full to the brim with his special mixture.

And all the while, that awful chanting came from the boom-box in the corner, set against the wall... some kind of ancient cassette, recorded God-knew-where, of a cultish singing and howling. Every time the tape ran down, Jack came down to flip it over and start it all over again. And refill our tanks with more of that awful, dizzying, delightful liquid.

I clung to my sanity... but my grip had a tendency to come loose. At certain points, drifting between sleep and wakefulness, I felt a terrible power seize me and I began gulping with the mindless, idiot greed of a prize pig. I knew in those moments that Jack wasn't entirely insane. There was *something* in that room with us, something vast and dark and hungry. Something gluttonous and foul. A presence that made the room stink, worse than any of the farts we released.

And oh, how we *reeked* together. How we blasted flatulence and belches into that tiny, humid chamber, filling it with our emissions. After a few days, I actually began to feel a sick sort of pride when I ripped a big one, a stupid grin distorting my features and giving me some of the only conscious pleasure I was still capable of feeling. It was a casual, subconscious pleasure to eat... but it was a *joy* to fart, to blast out vast rumblings of gas into the air, to smell the stench of my own insides set free. The candle-flames bloomed brighter during these releases, as if the sheer methane in the room was fueling the flames.

The black candles guttered down to tiny stubs, eventually... and were replaced. As were our restraints, when our wrists became too fat for the straps. Day after day of nothing but eating, farting and occasionally voiding our bowels... We were *truly* hogs, fed into a blissful stupor. But it was not to last. Because in my drunken haze, when I'd come in, I had pulled off the sort of clumsy coup that only an alcoholic's luck could have enabled.

Behind the boom box, nestled against the wall, in between the cans of paint on the shelving that had once made this basement a place of industry... I had stored my police radio. Right after I'd first entered the basement, I'd slipped it back there, worried that something might happen to us. I wasn't able to broadcast back to headquarters, not at this distance... but I had tuned it to the local police frequency. Cops didn't come out here often... but if they did, and they *must* after two detectives had gone missing... when they came, they would hear that eerie chanting and thumping from their cruiser radios. They would

know something was wrong. That a dark force lurked in the shadows of the swamp, in these lands. That Jack's family property just *happened* to be the epicenter of these strange, eerie transmissions.

All I could do was lay there and eat... and hope. Hope that the battery didn't run out, before they found us.

After a small eternity of eating, I awoke from my stupor to find Jack sitting beside me.

He looked haggard. Angry. This was good; I relished the dark circles under his eyes and the twitch to his eyelids. Something was stressing him out.

There was a click, and I felt the near-incessant buzzing and vibrating in my groin fade away. Over the past few days... weeks?... There was no time, in the cellar, only eating... Over the past few replacements of the lard, I had been constantly subjected to minor, unwilling orgasms. And suddenly, they had stopped.

The female body is a traitor. If you check the biology textbooks, there's nothing about it... but the horrible fact is, our bodies *are* designed to lubricate during some forms of forceful sexual contact. It's a survival mechanism--torn genitals would have been a liability, in the rape-filled past of *Homo Sapiens*. And so, we get wet sometimes, when things are forced... in there. It's not arousal--not at all. I should clarify that. It's not intimacy, and it's not enjoyable. In fact, it's one of the more horrifying things a woman can experience in her lifetime. The sensation of an unwilling orgasm during sexual assault can leave scars that last a lifetime.

And after that vibrator had been stuck to my clit for *days*, I had scars aplenty.

Jack dropped the vibrator to the floor. His voice was raspy, harsh, nothing like the over-confident intellectual who'd trapped us in here.

"I've been getting *visitors*, Randi Carter."

My vision swam. I struggled to speak as he pulled the feeding tube out of my mouth. Through the fading haze of bliss, I glimpsed Carlita across the room--she was swollen all over now, stretch-marks

dotting her frame, her nude body splattered with dried lard. She looked at me, and this time I *knew* she was in there. She was clinging to the same thing I was: the hope of our escape. Together.

“I dunno... **BRALLCH**, what’cher talkin’ ‘bout.”

And in those moments, it was true. My brain was a soggy mush full of chemicals, my body a newly flabby and useless bag of meat. I’d gained a lot of weight since I started eating--whenever that had been. My belly hung down, my breasts sagged. Even my face felt fatter.

Jack’s eyelid twitched.

“You know exactly what I’m talking about. Pig.” All his fancy speeches were gone, now: I saw nothing more than an evil, paranoid pervert in his eyes. “The cops have been showing up. At first just a few. But now they’re talking about a warrant. Saying they have ‘evidence’ that two detectives might have been kidnapped, out here.”

I grinned stupidly, and farted at him, long and loud. “Jack, I’m just a **BURP**, a pig... a sow for the Black Goat. I wouldn’t know anything about *thaaat*.” And I laughed, because in my haze of drugs, it really did seem funny. I was just a piggy, now. *Pig-pig-piggy! Soo-ee!*

Jack bit his lip so hard, I could see blood beading on his front teeth. “Randi. I don’t appreciate you lying to me. Somehow, you tipped off those pricks--even though I had my men search your office, and destroy your case files. Somehow, people still know you’re here. How?”

I shrugged, the flabby flesh of my upper arms wiggling. “Maybe it’s just bad luck. **BRELCH**. Or maybe... the Black Goat is mad at you.”

He blinked. “W-what? I am Her avatar. Her servant. Why would she...”

I cut him off with another rancid fart. “Look, Jackie boy... I’ve had a lot of time to think down here. Big, weird thoughts. And I’ve been thinking... a goddess of fertility and obesity... she doesn’t sound so bad. She sounds kinda *nice*, actually. But she also--**BRUHARRP**, scuze me--she doesn’t sound like the type who would kidnap innocent women and shove them in a basement. That’s all *you*, buddy.

The Black Goat didn't tell you to do that--you did it yourself. You're perverting her message." I giggled. "Ya *perv*."

"No. That's... That's not possible." His eyes darted around, paranoid, delusional. "I am Her servant. I am to be the lord of the new world--the one covered in flesh. I have been anointed!"

"Anointed, my *fat ass*." I deliberately farted again, in case the message hadn't gotten through. "You're just a dirty little boy whose family worships a naughty sex goddess. But like most guys, you don't *get* it. Pleasure and gluttony isn't locking people up and forcing them to accept the Goddess."

I glanced across at Carlita. Her eyes drifted... but there was a desperation in them. She could see I was winning--slowly triumphing over his philosophy with my own. I'd had a *long* time to reflect on how to pick apart Jack's basket-case brain... and finally, finally, he'd taken the tube out.

Finally, I could call him what he was: a deluded asshole.

"You tie us up and force-feed us and tell us we're pigs... but we're not. Not until we *choose* to be. And if you force us... Well. We haven't *decided* to be pigs then, have we?"

He shook his head. "Shut up. Shut up..."

"Someone like you could never serve the Goddess. You only serve your own dick--you can't possibly speak to Her."

I heaved myself up, body jiggling, gas leaking from between my greasy, unwashed buttocks. "But she's spoken to *me*, Jack. She's talked to me quite a lot, since you strapped me down."

It was fucked up, but I actually *believed* some of what I was saying. That presence in the room, that dark and brooding energy... it seemed to collect in me as I spoke, filling me with a glorious, righteous anger. The anger of a Goddess whose message had been twisted, distorted. Filtered through a perverted asshole and his corrupted family.

Someone needed to take that message back. And I had decided, at least for the purposes of escaping this place, that person was *me*.

“You’re twisting Her commands, Jack. We can’t revel in gluttony and filth if you force us to... and you can’t ever experience the blessing of the Black Goat, usher in Her reign, if all you care about is torturing Her chosen queens.”

“Bullshit. It’s all bullshit. Father told me... we were chosen.” His voice was shaking. “We were chosen. Back when New Orleans was first founded, the *loa* came to his grandfather and told him...”

“You really think the Black Goat would choose a *man* for her disciple?” I snorted. “Men know nothing about pleasure. But women... We know. We know what it means to *hunger*.”

I stared him down, and that terrible greedy presence filled me to the brim. My words were hardly my own. On one level, I was improvising, ad-libbing... but something *else* was there too. Something vast, and powerful, swelling inside me.

“We know what it means to be told *no*, over and over again. Don’t eat that donut. Don’t drink that beer. Stop stuffing your face. Please others, don’t please yourself. For God’s sake, we don’t even get taught about the clitoris, in most schools. They’re *afraid* of us, Jack. Afraid of what we could do, what we could unleash, if women fully gave in to the unlimited power of their own pleasure. Their own indulgence.”

He sat there, looking floored. Then he stood, pacing the room. He switched off the boom-box. “Shut up. Shut up. I need to... I need to think.”

Clarita and the others, still fuzzy with drugs but lucid enough to hear most of my speech, watched me with bovine curiosity. They could sense the power in the room was shifting. Jack was falling out of favor with the Goddess--*our* Goddess. If nothing else, he had successfully Stockholmed us... we believed in Her. We believed in feasting.



But we didn't believe in *him*. And that made him powerless. A true psychopath lusts for control--to exert their will on others. And no matter what he did to us, I had caused him to doubt his control. That was unravelling him.

"Move you. I'll need to move you." He nodded to himself. "Get the old trailer truck from behind the barn. Take you... somewhere else. They know we're here, but they don't know where. If I can move you..."

"Good luck getting Henrietta out those stairs again. Or Dameika."

It was true--their monstrously obese bodies probably wouldn't fit out the cellar door, now. Dameika in particular was growing hideously fat, so obese she could hardly be recognized as a human being. In a burst of weird lust, I was almost *jealous* of her. She clearly had the Goddess' favor.

*Easy, now*, I reminded myself, struggling to stay on task. *All of that... it's not real. He just convinced you it is.*

But had he? Or was there something, even now, filling my body with an insane hunger I couldn't place? Some faraway entity, reaching her flabby will through the walls of reality... imbuing me with a desire to *become* her?

*Focus, Randi. Focus. You can pig out later... right now, you need to take this asshole down.*

He snapped his fingers. "You're wrong. They're too big to get out. But they're not too big to get out... in *pieces*." Grinning like the maniac he was, he ascended the stairs. "You girls keep eating. I'll be back shortly... with some *euthanasia* for your ills."

My blood ran cold. "Jack--"

He shook his head, his mania carrying him far away from my influence. "I thought I needed you all, to finish the ritual. But I don't. I can just make more pigs. There are plenty in this world... plenty where y'all came from."

And with that, the cellar door slammed as he departed.

“JACK!” My heart was pounding. I looked around at my ‘sisters,’ fellow victims, all as helpless as I was. The smell of unwashed female flesh was around us, but something new had entered the mix: fear. The stench of fear.

We had to stop him, but I couldn’t fathom *how*. Carlita was in the best position to try--she was closest to the door. But she was tightly bound, and still drugged.

She was also, I noticed with mild interest, much *bigger* than me. Whether through genetics or simple greed, Carlita was almost double my size--a wide-hipped, food-splattered flabby mess of a woman. She had taken to a pig’s life excellently, and was even snorting around her tube, much like a sow. Her wrists were almost too fat for her restraints...

Of course. The restraints. I looked at mine--Jack hadn’t replaced them for ages, and my flesh was bulging against the leather strips, the circulation nearly cut off. And the tube was lying beside my face, still dribbling lard.

*Is it possible? Maybe I could...*

No. It made no sense. No one could gain weight that fast--not even us. Not even Jack’s prize pigs.

And yet...

I still wanted to try. Not even out of a desire to escape--sure, if my wrists got fat enough, I might break free. But even if they didn’t... I wanted to *eat*. I was a glutton now, a true hog. I had one purpose in this universe--the Black Goat had taught me that.

And my purpose was to *eat*.

Rolling my head to one side, I managed to get the tube back into my mouth. The tank was full--he had just topped it off this morning. Maybe if I could...

I began sucking on the tube. Sweet, perfect, eggnog-flavored lard gushed down my throat, and I almost moaned with ecstasy. I didn't even need the vibrator anymore--Pavlov's law had taught my body to feel erotic stimulation while eating, and I grew steadily wetter as I sucked on the tube, drawing more calories into myself. More lard. More soon-to-be-flesh.

And as I ate, I prayed to the Black Goat. If She really *was* real, she prized us pigs far over that idiot Jack... and if it was Her will, She would set us free.

**Gulp, glukk, glurrrp...**

Faster and faster. More, more, *more*. I guzzled and swallowed and gulped and belched and farted, humiliating myself completely in my gluttonous eating-spree. Soon I was growing full once again, bloated, swollen...

Heavier. Heavier and larger and more *massive*.

I began rocking from side to side, tugging on the restraints, almost *feeling* my wrists grow fatter. My heart was beating fast--too fast. This diet of indolence and greed had made me very unhealthy... a fact which, to my own shame, actually made me *wetter*.

I was a hog. A pig. A queen sow. And I was getting bigger by the second... my wrists chubbier and chubbier. Straining the old leather. Cracking it. My mass, flopping back and forth, flesh jiggling and breasts wobbling, was also working the restraints to their breaking point.

From outside, I heard the beeping of a large truck backing up. One of Jack's family's fast food trucks, from the sound of it. Except instead of carrying chicken nuggets, this truck would be carrying sliced-and-diced pig.

We were running out of time.

*Please, Goddess. Please. Make me bigger*, I pleaded, against all logic and common sense. *Make me fatter. Let me punish this fool for misusing Your tools: gluttony and pleasure. He has failed You.*

*Let me punish him.*

There was an audible **snap** as one of the restraints broke. And then the other. Impossibly, my arms were free. From there, it was a simple matter of undoing the ones around my ankles.

I struggled to sit up. My muscles, atrophied beyond belief, ached and strained. I was too fat to touch my toes, now... my belly oozed out, blocking my path. But I pushed and pushing, and finally, red-faced and wheezing and belching, I caught hold of the restraints and undid them.

Staggering to my feet, I looked around the room for a weapon. But there was nothing--the boombox was cheap plastic, the feeding tanks were bolted to the floor. All I had was my own body.

And in a burst of perverse inspiration, I realized that was enough.

I was *big* now, a very big girl. Nearly three hundred pounds, give or take a few. My own flesh was alien to me: swollen, wobbling, pendulous. But I was still able to move, and move I did. I dragged the boom-box table to the corner, next to the cellar stairs. And huffing and puffing like a woman on the verge of a heart attack--which felt pretty accurate--I clambered on top of the old butcher-block table.

It was ancient, sturdily built... and creaked under my weight, my new girth making it sway and groan. But I made it. Soaked in sweat, farting like a hog, I managed to get on top of it. And I was just out of view of the door.

Frantic, pattering footfalls came from the cellar staircase. I glanced at the weird carvings, there: the products of a diseased mind, but the *idea* of them was more powerful than the carvings themselves. A Goddess, bloated and fecund, seeking pleasure across the universe. And somehow, I had become Her avatar.

Jack burst through the door, carrying a pneumatic gun--the kind they killed cows with, in the slaughterhouses down by Baton Rouge. Powered by an air compressor, it would shoot a deadly bolt into a steer's skull, killing it instantly.

But it was no match for a cow who *knew* when her killer was coming.

“Hey, Jack.”

He looked up, confused to hear my voice coming from the wrong place in the room--and hesitated. I could see on his face he had no idea how I'd escaped. My victory made no sense in his demented world view... a world where only *he* could please the Goddess. His hesitation was his undoing.

“Hail the Black Goat,” I said, and fell on him.

When the cops finally arrived hours later, they said his body looked as if a piano had landed on him. He was nothing but paste, his ribcage crumpled, his whole frame flattened. When I told them I'd done it, they looked at me with incredulity, and disgust. The physics didn't add up, Carlita told me later. Three hundred pounds was a lot of woman... but it wasn't enough to turn a man into a pancake.

When they told me these things, I just smiled and shrugged. I told them maybe he'd had weak bones. Maybe the incest in his family had made him extra-delicate. But I knew the truth.

The Goddess had crushed poor Jack--smashed him out of this world, for misusing Her disciples. Her pigs, her prized gluttons, had been mistreated by his hands. And She had punished him for it.

The full force of the Louisiana Sheriff's Department descended on the orchard, supplemented by the NOLA P.D., who was suddenly very apologetic and subservient to me--the survivor of a kidnapping, and one of their “best detectives.” Yeah, sure. Whatever, assholes. Pull the other one.

I quit the force shortly after that. So did Clarita. We had had enough of solving crimes... of dealing with psychopaths. And we had new aspects of our friendship to explore. Maybe something more than friendship.

We also had a lot of trauma to work through, together. I often woke up screaming with nightmares, after that night--convinced Jack was still alive, and after me. Clarita always comforted me, and I did the same for her.

Yet... we never quite lost the weight. We tried to adjust back to “normal” life, the world of diets and thin-culture and supermodels on billboards, but it didn’t work. We had seen the other side, a universe of endless pleasure, and forever afterwards we found ourselves reaching for another slice of pie, or another soda. Always more, always hungry. It was never enough.

We returned the kidnapped girls to their families... but we also started a support group, meeting in the back room of the local YWCA. There was always food, of course. And frequent cigarette breaks. And a little bit of crying.

But deep beneath our trauma there was a sense of shared victory... that we had triumphed over something evil, in that dark room. That we were free.

And it wasn’t long before we decided to exercise that freedom.

Louisiana was no longer the place for us. Over-exposed by the media and the size of our own bodies, we never had the chance of fading back into private life. All of us needed a fresh start... somewhere we could keep each other close. Somewhere far, far away from where we’d experienced the greatest horror--and pleasure--of our lives.

It was Clarita who found the flyers for Sow’s Bend. The first town in America to adopt obesity-centric transportation, public spaces and doorway widths. Pioneers of the larger form. Most of America avoided the town like the plague--it had *always* been a fat place, some people online said. Always a haven for gluttons. No one was sure why, but if you wanted to stay thin, you stayed the hell away from Sow’s Bend.

It was the perfect hideout.

We moved there--all of us. And then, very quietly, our “support group” morphed into a new shape. Something less like Alcoholics Anonymous... and more like a church.

The Church of the Black Goat.

It's funny--I never touched another drop of alcohol, after my experience with Jack and his beliefs. I told people I'd been 'scared straight'... but that wasn't true at all.

The truth was, I'd just exchanged one addiction for another. Left behind the cult of the barstool for a much newer and exciting form of intoxication.

Deep in the woods of rural Washington state, we lived together. Ate together. Grew fatter together. The Black Goat's daughters made love... and grew. And grew.

Someday, I think, we might lose control of our appetites... and swallow the whole damn world down our gluttonous, flabby throats.

What a beautiful day that will be.

*~Finis~*