

CHAPTER 1

Sometimes, in the early morning hours the conversation I had with the monkey comes back to me. The conversation occurred when I had a summer job at the biological sciences lab at UC Davis. For reasons unknown to me then and now I had dropped acid at work. Maybe I had dropped out of boredom or maybe I did it because I was supposed to hear what the monkey had to say. I don't know, but I do know when I heard the monkey's words in my head, I wasn't surprised in the least. Sweeping the floor in front of his cage, I had looked up and noticed this animal watching me. I remember my first thought: "Wow, check out this monkey!" And as I stood there tripping, I heard the words in my head that are as clear today as they were then: "Who do you think you are anyhow? At least I know I'm in a cage."

The tires screeched as we turned the corner. Her body, warm and full of promise, pressed tightly against me as the car's momentum brought us closer together. When we came out of the corner she didn't move away and although the road ahead was now straight and

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clear, my feelings told me that I could no longer see where I was headed.

Her name was Pamela Huntington. I had met her only a short time before but the brevity of our acquaintance was irrelevant. Even when I first saw her, I wanted to spend a long time with her. Forever, if possible, but in the event it wasn't to be, I was equally sure that a night would do just fine. Though I didn't know what kind of woman Pamela Huntington was, I did know what I wanted her to be. In retrospect, I couldn't have been more wrong.

We pulled out onto Doyle Drive, merging with four lanes of heavy traffic as we headed across the Golden Gate Bridge towards Marin County. I had lived in Marin years before. It was a different place then but I was different too, now. Time changes everything; sometimes for the better, sometimes not. Marin had definitely changed for the worse. Once open countryside populated with small towns and interesting people, Marin had become increasingly inundated with aging yuppies, temporary winners in America's restricted affluence sweepstakes where the winner takes all and crumbs are left for the losers.

Driving across the Golden Gate Bridge with a beautiful woman on a beautiful night was an unexpected pleasure in a life filled with unexpected events. Sometimes those events are pleasurable but more often they are not. I have observed that certainty is but a defense mechanism against life's abrupt nature; and, as I got older, the less I would take refuge in its illusory safety. A woman like Pamela

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Huntington promised to be a far better haven from life's constant storms, a haven I hoped to be as long lasting as she was beautiful. I was to find out, however, that Pamela Huntington was to be no haven at all – at least for me.

All across the bridge up 101 through the tunnel and then down into Gate 5 in Sausalito I had the pleasure of feeling her body next to mine. A woman's presence is an extraordinary thing. It is not a question of what women bring to the party; for if the truth be really known, without women there is no party at all. There is no perfume in the world more heady than the simple presence of a woman. From women emanates a magnetism, complex and powerful, comprised of insistent needs and hidden desires, and of promises as old as they are misunderstood. One of the greatest pleasures in being a man is knowing the gifts that a woman gives. They are gifts, however, that women can bestow on whomever they please, not just men.

It was with regret that I parked the Alfa in front of the Yellow Ferry Harbor. I didn't want things to change. I didn't want her not to be there beside me. I wanted to feel the presence of her body forever and the pressure of her warm flesh against mine until, at least, there was the certainty of more. We got out of the car and the Sausalito air was crisp and clean, reminiscent of cool ocean sprays commingled with the sweet rich warmth of the earth which had now risen up to meet it.

I followed Pamela down the harbor's wooden walkway until we came to a houseboat next to the Yellow Ferry itself. I consider myself

something of a Philistine when it comes to appreciating art but I did have a definite hit from this houseboat. What little I knew about architecture, I knew for damn sure this floating home wasn't cheap. It was constructed of expensive hardwoods. Stained glass and leaded windows were in abundance and the detail and finishing work were absolutely professional. Those who built this houseboat were as much artisans as laborers and whoever paid for it had bucks as well as taste. It didn't surprise me that Pamela would live in such a houseboat. It would surprise me who lived there with her.

Inside, the houseboat was as opulent as was its exterior expensively demure. Hidden lights hi-lighted artifacts whose origins ranged from pre-Colombian digs to expensive New York and European galleries. A whistle of appreciation escaped my lips. Pamela smiled at my surprise.

“Beautiful, isn't it?”

It was and it seemed all so perfect. The clear Sausalito night, Pamela Huntington's magnetic beauty, and now this magnificent houseboat.

“Pam, is that you?”

Footsteps followed the voice down the spiral staircase and a woman entered the room. It wasn't just any woman, though, just like Pamela wasn't any ordinary female and the houseboat wasn't just another floating habitat on an overcrowded waterfront. No, the woman was as well known to me as was the London spot price of gold to Swiss bankers. She was Sara Gold, one of the nation's pre-eminent criminal

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attorneys. Big time drug cases were Sara's stock in trade. A godsend to those desperate and lucky enough to have her services, she was respected and feared by the prosecuting attorneys having the ill fortune of facing her in court. Every time I had seen Sara before, she had been dressed in a power suit. Tonight, she had on a silk kimono.

Sara glanced at me before she went to greet Pamela. The two women embraced and, as I watched, Sara kissed Pamela on her lips with familiar pleasure and proprietary enjoyment. Sara then turned and looked at me. She had never been one to mince words and she obviously hadn't changed.

"I thought you were still in prison."

"Time flies when you're doing it." I replied. "I was sentenced under the old guidelines."

If I'd been busted one year later, I'd still be doing time because of the new minimum mandatory sentencing guidelines. But the sight of Sara kissing Pamela tonight was as much a shock as the appearance of the DEA's guns and badges had been ten years before. Time had obviously distorted my memory of that event because this evening's sudden turn seemed as devastating as my memories of that day long ago. But it was not the sight of Pamela kissing another woman that bummed me out. I was bummed because it had just dawned on me that it was highly unlikely I was ever going to kiss Pamela Huntington myself.

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Although I hoped my disappointment didn't show, I sensed that if Sara cared about my feelings, it wasn't empathy for my sense of loss. And I had no idea what Pamela felt. But whatever it was, it took nothing away from her beauty. It also took nothing away from the ache and desire I still felt for her.

"How do you two know each other?" Sara's question showed no evidence of jealousy, a lack which perhaps stemmed from a deep confidence in Pamela's sexual responsiveness and orientation.

"We don't really. I saw her at the Ritz Carlton. She was waiting for a cab and, unfortunately, there happened to be a shortage of taxis."

"How unfortunate...and, naturally, you were gracious enough to offer her a ride to Sausalito."

"Naturally."

It was true. There had been no taxis and I had offered and Pamela had accepted. I did leave out how much I wanted Pamela but I was sure that such a soliloquy would have little effect on Sara or Pamela permitting me to have what I still wanted. Although my ability to show grace under pressure had been heightened during my previous brush with the law, it was now diminishing rapidly as my chances of bedding Pamela had now disappeared.

I nodded in Pamela's direction. "Well, it was a pleasure in giving you a ride home and I should be going."

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“Wait...”

I would have given my car keys and what little was left in my safety deposit box for Pamela to have uttered that word but she didn't. It was Sara and Sara was looking at me with a newfound interest. There was nothing to suggest however that she was considering a ménage and it seemed highly inappropriate for me to suggest it on my own. But it was only the futility of my doing so that kept me from suggesting my vain hope aloud and so I waited for Sara to continue.

“Did you know that Tim Kopel is cooperating?”

I didn't have to ask who Tim Kopel was or with whom he was cooperating. Kopel was a smuggler and cooperating meant only one thing – Kopel was talking to the feds. It didn't surprise me. Nothing much did these days except finding out tonight that Pamela preferred women and I didn't blame her much for doing so for I preferred women myself. Kopel, though, was another matter. He knew a lot of the people I knew and he was more than selfish enough to offer their freedom to the feds in exchange for his.

“How do you know?”

“He switched lawyers last week. His new lawyer is Barry Carr.”

Barry Carr was a former prosecutor who was now doing defense work. There were persistent rumors that he had been forced out of the prosecutor's office for some sort of sexual malfeasance. Those rumors were never verified but it was true that Carr had a reputation

for handling clients who had turned. If Kopel had switched lawyers it was probably because Carr was cutting the deal with the feds, his former employers.

Sara continued to look at me with interest. “It might be more than luck that you gave Pam a ride home. You might be just the one who can help her.”

I looked over at Pamela. She wasn’t looking at me. She was looking at Sara.

“How can he help?” She asked.

When I heard her words I wanted to answer that I could help her in many ways, in ways that she perhaps had too hastily discarded when she had turned to women for love, that if she felt so inclined I would try and be considerate and gentle and sensitive and whatever else she might want and need. Hell, I’d even dress up in a dress if that would get her off. It had been less than fifteen minutes since we had left the Alfa together, and already I was going through more changes than I had in the past six months. Where it was headed, I had no idea but I had the feeling it still didn’t include what I wanted.

“I’m not sure,” Sara replied to Pamela, then looking at me she said, “You should probably take off your jacket and make yourself comfortable. Pam can tell you what you need to know.”