

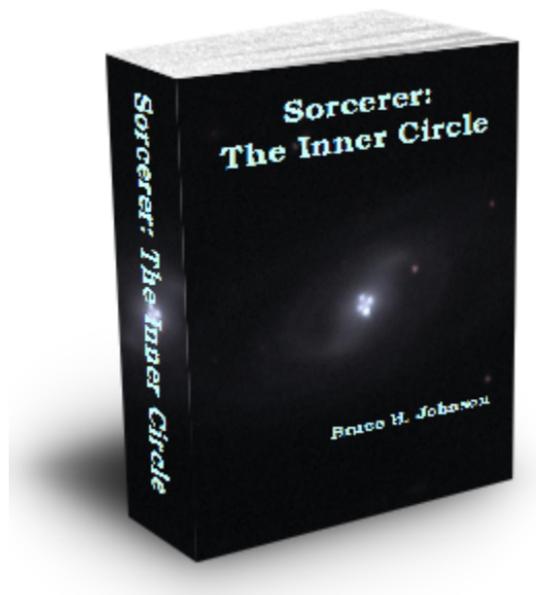
Sorcerer: The Inner Circle

Sample

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Sorcerer: The Inner Circle



Book 1 of the Sorcerer. What happens to an ordinary empath when he meets a wonderful lady and falls in love? Find out if the Sorcerer's "magic" can really make things go right for him and his close friends in a mundane world.

This is an erotic romance exploring the nature of the spirit and its relationship to the world we know. Just in case the term "erotic" doesn't cover it, this is an adult book with explicit sex: mainly MF and MFF. No BDSM, D/S, water sports or scat. The characters bath frequently so there's extremely little dirty sex.

Publishing History

First published on storiesonline.net as a serial:

First chapter released October 1, 2005.

Last chapter released December 29, 2005

Print Publication

<http://stores.lulu.com/bjohn36> March, 2007

Ebook Publication

<http://www.freespirituniverse.org> July 2009

Cover Art

The Einstein Cross gravitational lens 2237+030

<http://www.astr.ua.edu/keel/agn/qso2237.html>

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Reviews

"Great story. It sucked me in and kept me waiting to see what happens next. I'm a big proponent of character development and yours are great. Each person stands alone with a distinct personality that adds to the story. I sometimes have trouble getting into story with multiple first person points of view but your and the switches between characters just seem to flow." — M

"Outstanding!" — T

"Amazing first five chapters, your characters are brilliant, kind, loving and extremely sensitive. I have never started a story that I liked better than this one. I implore you please continue" — D

"Wow! Great story! Thanks! I like the plot, the characters, and the dialogue - esp. the jokes and bad puns." — A

"A very imaginative story, excellent character development and a fun read. Keep it coming." — A

"A story I want to save, it is delightful. Thank you for sharing it with us and I hope you will write many more like this." — D

"Awesomely fun story. I like a good story. This one is the must generally fun and uplifting I have read in a while." — R

“Thank you for this story. I really loved reading it. I am going to wait and see what happens in the upcoming stories of the Sorcerer to see what is going to happen next. Keep up the great writing. Even if sometimes it gets to be a tear jerker.” — S

“Thank you, I very very much enjoyed your writing. It touched me every deeply.” — D

Forward

Let's talk about a free spirit universe. This is a world where people discover they don't *have* a soul; they *are* a soul, a spirit which can free itself from the flesh.

Close your eyes and think of a beautiful sunset. Got it? What is looking at that picture of a sunset? It sure isn't the body's eyes. It's you, the spirit, looking at it. Maybe this universe isn't as far-fetched as it may seem at first glance.

This is a story about people who discover this universe and some of its implications. Could you do it? Who knows?

This isn't a story of teen-age angst or "character development." I figure that the game should be "our group against the world" rather than "how much can I screw up my personal relationships with jealousy, miscommunication and stupid actions."

You'll notice immediately we're looking at Irish characters. I'm not Irish, so forgive my errors. I picked the Irish for the flavor of the language; all I really know about the customs and the language (Gaelic) comes right off the Internet.

Fair warning: This is an adult novel with romance and sex. Maybe too much sex for some. If it offends you and you still like the story, just keep turning the pages.

There are mental communications and actions in this font to distinguish them from “normal” ones.

There’s day and date scattered throughout to help you keep the timeline straight. It’s the 2005 - 2006 calendar so that’s the story’s time setting. You won’t find a lot of “current events” such as the Iraq war and Hurricane Katrina; those really have no bearing on the story.

The main concept of the Free Spirit Universe is that the spirit which is you can be freed from the body without harm to either.

As you read the stories, note that the story world, apparent moral codes (mainly about sex), events, characters, abilities and most everything is my imagination and don't reflect any currently-known facts. The actual cities such as Burbank do exist, but beyond that don't count on much.

Thank you to L. Ron Hubbard, whose philosophy forms the basis for many of the ideas you find here. If I mention something that I know is one of his ideas or technologies, I'll attempt to give you a direct Internet reference to it -- some are part of his large volumes of work and aren't really available on line. About the only exception is his (and my) knowledge that people (you and me) are actual spirits.

These works have no connection with Mr. Hubbard or any of the organizations he developed or have been developed since his death. I neither speak for nor represent them in any way beyond being somewhat

knowledgeable about Mr. Hubbard's work. You can "blame" everything in the story world on me except those areas I've specifically noted.

Thank you to the many readers on SOL (storiesonline.net) who gave me constructive feedback and caught a lot of my typos

Relax and enjoy; may you ladies experience the Sorcerer's Grip!

Chapter 1

Bob Reynolds
(Wednesday 9/7)

Well, it was the first day of school. I was looking forward to seeing what I could learn in the Senior classes. Even in the most boring required classes, I can pick up something useful. There might be some viewpoint or some bit of information I could put together with something else.

“Hey, The Sherry!” She looked good after the summer. We need to do some catching up.

She grinned at me. “Sorcerer! Righteous Bob! High-Five!”

“Yess!” We smacked our hands together. The Sherry’s really good people — half-Spanish, shoulder-length shiny black hair, about 5’ 6”, very nice-looking with a great figure — and *smart*. We’d dated a couple times last school year, but there hadn’t been the right kind of chemistry between us.

We called her “The” Sherry because George and I believed she was truly unique. Of course, we frequently told her it was a Real Good Thing she *was* unique — the world couldn’t handle more than one of her!

Turned out George, Sherry and I had all the Honors classes together, so we hustled to our first period and snagged our usual seats in the front row.

I saw someone I didn’t recognize, which is unusual for me. I nudged Sherry. “The girl by the windows — you know her?”

She whispered back, “Trust you to notice the girls first. I don’t know her; she must be a...”

“Newbie!” we whispered together.

She looked alert and paid attention to everything. Nice-looking neck. Gloriously-long, glossy, jet-black hair in a pony tail. When she turned her head, I saw lovely white skin and freckles. Black Irish! She was yummy!

Sherry Stapley

Bob and I waylaid her outside the classroom. Always subtle, I asked, “Hello, we don’t recognize you. You’re new here?”

She replied promptly with a wide smile and a good amount of Irish accent, “Oh, yeh. New kid on the block, in the school, in Burbank and in California.”

Sticking my hand out, I told her, "Well, welcome to McCambridge High School. I'm Sherry Stapley."

She took it promptly and said, "Natalie Shanahan." We looked each other over. She was tall, had glossy jet-black hair in the standard pony tail, pleasant face, freckles and no makeup or jewelry. But oh those clothes! Long, baggy and hide-it-all. Hmm, that might need some attention.

Turning towards Bob, I told her, "And this is..."

He reached his hand out and told her, "Bob Reynolds." She readily grasped his hand, and they stood there looking at each other. Now I've known Bob for years, and he always just does a quick shake and release with someone new. Not this time; they just stood gazing at each other. What's happening here?

I smacked him with my elbow. "You can let go, Bob. She's not going to disappear right in front of you."

"Oh." He blinked his eyes and shook his head a bit. He dropped her hand, almost reluctantly, and stepped back.

Natalie pinked up and grinned a little. She said softly, "No, I'm here for the duration."

I frowned at him a moment. What's up with him? Anyway, I had a new person to handle.

I told her, "Don't worry too much about him. He's been a little slow ever since his last girl friend smacked him in the head with a ball bat. We've had the hardest time trying to teach him how to hit on girls politely."

She looked at him as if she didn't care *how* he hit on her, just so he *did*.

I continued, "Anyway, our tradition is we escort newcomers to the cafeteria for lunch so they don't get lost. So, care to join us?"

She gave us a devastatingly brilliant smile. "I'd love to."

I saw her glance over at Bob — and a set of nipples popped up hard under her shirt. Uh, oh, Bob's in trouble!

Bob

Jaysus, I've never been this much out of it with anyone, even when I've been (only once) drunk on my ass. When I took her hand and looked into her eyes, I felt as if I'd fallen into a pool of warm, sweet water. We'd merged together spiritually as if it were the most natural thing in the world to do. I couldn't move.

Natalie Shanahan

Newbie, newbie, new. Well, I'd visited Nana and Seanathair — Mom's parents — in Glendale before, but California is definitely different from Ohio. I was born and raised in Akron, the "Prophylactic Capital of the World." Yeh, that's a joke. Akron is the "Rubber Capital of the World"

where many of the major tire manufacturers live. We'd moved into our new house in Burbank in time to do the first round of school-counselor interviews to get my classes set up.

My stepfather, Don, had gotten a teacher's position at McCambridge High School in Burbank where I'd be going. I certainly hoped Mom would do better in a new place where she wouldn't be reminded all the time of what had happened to her.

Oh, God. The first day of school, as a Senior. I'd not had time to get too nervous before, but now I was. Don and I walked in; he went directly to his classroom while I moved onto my first class. Fortunately, I'd had time last week to roam the halls and find the classrooms after I'd met with the Counselor and we'd made up my schedule.

The kids here looked pretty happy for the first day of school. The school was in good condition with the standard trophy display cases and banners welcoming the students back. Students! That's me, too.

The kids at the school I'd been at in Ohio had been pretty degraded. Don mentioned he'd seen the attitude getting poorer over the last several years. This school seemed different somehow, generally a lot more happy and enthusiastic. For right now, I could only hope.

My first class went pretty well. It was the routine first-day stuff with the teacher telling us how she graded, passing out books, and all the rest of the routine stuff.

Right after class, a couple walked up to me. The girl asked if I was new here. Of course I said I was new to everything, even California. She didn't blink an eye, stuck out her hand and introduced herself.

I took her hand. She was a really cute Hispanic-looking young lady, with a lot of self-confidence. She was neatly dressed without overdoing anything; I wished I could wear clothes like that, but oh, well. She introduced the guy — Bob Reynolds.

He stepped forward and put out his hand. As I put out my hand to his, I saw he was a couple inches taller than me. It's always nice to look up a bit. He had the Black Irish look like me.

I took his hand, looked at his blue-green eyes and got totally lost. I just couldn't move. It felt as if every warm-and-fuzzy feeling I'd ever had filled me up. I have no idea how long we just stood there holding hands, looking at each other and joining our souls together.

Sherry finally smacked him one with her elbow and said something. Bob shook his head as if he'd been dazed, and we dropped back. I knew I was blushing but hoped I wasn't acting too dumb. We said something and stepped back.

Sherry looked at him, kind of puzzled. Uh, oh. Did she think I was trying to make a move on her boyfriend?

Anyway, it was all a blur for a few minutes, and I found myself agreeing to have lunch with them. I glanced at Bob and... Oh. My. God. My nipples tightened up, and it really hadn't been sexual at all.

It turned out Bob was in all my Honors classes in the morning, and either Sherry or someone named George was in all my classes. It looked as if I had escorts throughout the day.

Sherry

Bob and I picked up Natalie after the last morning class and walked to the cafeteria. We normally brown-bagged it (no offense to the cafeteria food, it was actually pretty decent), and I noticed Natalie did too.

We got to our normal foursome table. I got Natalie seated across from me and motioned Bob to sit beside her. Being the good boy he was, he took the hint and sat down in his "proper place." Well, if there was going to be something going on between them, I was certainly willing to help it out.

I'd known Bob for years. We'd dated a couple times with a bit of kissy-face, but we agreed we'd do great as friends. There probably wouldn't be any romantic relationship between us; in fact, I was a bit scared of him because of his strength.

Natalie looked a little puzzled when Bob sat down beside her instead of beside me. Oh! She thought Bob and I were together! I was about to

correct that impression when George came up with his lunch and plumped down on the seat beside me.

George was looking really good. We'd gone out a couple times a week at least over the summer, and here he was now. We three high-fived and got all excited about being together again. George and I eyeballed each other pretty good, too. I noticed Bob watching it; he doesn't miss much.

Bob took the lead in introducing Natalie to George as the "new resident of our illustrious school" and said, "And you'd better make a good impression on her, George."

George put on his mock hurt-puppy look and joked, "Yes, boss. Don't beat me again, boss. I'll be good, boss." He grinned at Natalie and said, "Welcome to the best high school in California!"

Bob mentioned they called me, "The Sherry," and why. Natalie grinned up a storm.

While they were shaking hands, Bob waved his hand between George and me while telling Natalie, "These two are 'doing a line together' like a couple of courting peacocks."

George and I did our leech acts and leered at each other. I said, "Hmm, together, eh? I guess we'll have to try it out."

George laughed and said, "Oh, yeh!" We leered at each other and slid our shoulders and hips together on the seat. We leaned our heads together and sighed, "Mmmm," while laughing at Natalie.

Bob just shook his head in mock disbelief and told Natalie, "You've got to keep an eye on these two. They tend to ignore the PDA rules."

Natalie

Sherry really puzzled me when she sat across from me at the lunch table and had Bob sit beside me. What had I missed? I'd been sure the two of them were together.

Then George showed up. He and Sherry "fell in love" right there. Well, I guess it handled the question of whether or not Bob and Sherry were together.

While we ate our brown bags, we chatted about the school, teachers, what events were going on, who was going with whom and all the rest of the high-school stuff. I kept glancing over at Bob. He felt really nice besides being Black Irish like my family; he had just the right amount of Irish accent.

One thing I noticed right away was all the gossip was nice. There wasn't a hint of anything bad about anyone. Now, back at my Ohio school, all the gossip would have been about how so-and-so dumped such-and-such, which girls were whores, who was sleeping with who and all those nasty

tidbits. Not with these people. Such a relief! In Ohio I had usually eaten lunch alone because of the nasty gossip everywhere, but here... I was determined to stay with these guys if they'd let me.

Every once in a while, Bob and Sherry would rattle off at each other for a bit in Spanish; it sounded like they were discussing her family. I didn't know much Spanish, but Spanish with an Irish accent?

After we were all pretty much done eating, Bob rapped the table lightly and said, "Okay, folks, the Inquisition is in session." George and Sherry immediately stopped laughing and joking and looked serious. I felt three pairs of eyes looking at me intently.

Bob said, "Natalie, we're going to put you to The Question."

Oh shit, what's going on? The Inquisition and The Question I knew about from history. Were we going to get into some kind of religious stuff? I got a sinking sensation in my stomach but tried to put on a good front.

With a totally solemn face, Bob said, "Natalie, we need to know what to do with you. For one thing, we've noticed this morning you're in all our Honors classes. Are you a nerd and a brain, a socialite, or somewhere in between?"

Huh? This sure wasn't a question about religion! I just looked at all of them for a bit. I wasn't sure what they expected as an answer but realized they weren't looking for any "correct" answer. They just looked

interested and willing to accept anything I'd say. I had the feeling my answer would heavily influence my stay at McCambridge.

I finally got out, "Well, I'm way towards the nerd end, but I can dance a little bit?" kind of questioning at the end with a bit of a smile.

They laughed at once and Bob said, "Great answer!" and beamed at me as if I were his prize pupil acing the exams. I immediately lost any sick feeling I'd had and laughed with them.

Smiling, Bob said to me, "Well then, how about you hang with us for a few days. We'll introduce you around to folks, see what and who you like, and at least get you acclimated to this way station in the path to higher education. Okay with you?"

Jaysus, *would* it be okay! My first day here and someone — no, several very nice someones — were offering to help me get oriented? No way would I pass that up!

I blurted out, "Definitely okay with me!" My face put on its best ear-to-ear smile.

Bob and I looked at each other again. I got lost in the warm feeling, and we sat there looking at each other, feeling wrapped around and through each other.

After forever I heard George and Sherry laughing. Sherry said, "Okay, *okay*, **okay**! Don't make me get out the water buckets!"

Bob and I finally broke eye contact, and I came out of my daze or whatever it was. We glanced at each other a few times, shrugged and grinned.

What was I feeling for this guy? I barely knew him, and I was getting all mushy. I knew I couldn't get into it too much with my family situation the way it was, but God, the feeling was so strong! Jaysus, I was even crinkled up again, and it felt as if I'd wet my panties!

Fortunately or unfortunately, lunch period was almost over. I had to duck into the bathroom to stuff TP in my knickers so I wouldn't drip all over and let everyone know how much I was in heat.

Sherry

I got Natalie off to the side before the last period. We girl-talked about how the classes were and how the teachers came across.

I asked her, "Could you use a bit of unsolicited advice?"

She responded, "Well, I'll certainly listen. Whether or not I'll take it is another question."

I said, "Okay, here's the deal. Bob, George and I are part of the Brain Trust — the tutors — around here. We're all nerds, but *some* of us can dance a little, too." I grinned at her and she laughed.

"We try to match up people as close as possible. If you'd been more towards the socialite end, we'd get you introduced ASAP into that crowd. You'd still have been welcome around us; we're not some snobbish clique or nerdy bunch of brats. Yes, there are some of the snobbish types around, but they're few and far between.

"As you've probably guessed by now, Bob is pretty much our leader; people often call him the Sorcerer because he always seems to come up with some magic to make things go right.

"The actual advice is that you find a girl-who-is-a-friend and a boy-who-is-a-friend. We're not trying to get you a boyfriend... yet. With a girl friend and a boy friend, you've got pretty much everything covered; you've got someone to talk with about pretty much anything. Make sense?"

Natalie

I told her, "Makes total sense to me." I hesitated then asked, "Sherry, would you be my girl-who-is-a-friend?"

She laughed and said, "I'd be honored to be such a friend; a girl who can rock Bob back on his heels like you have has *got* to have some class." She held up her hand and we high-fived. I'd never gotten even *one* of those back in Ohio!

She continued, "With your personality, you'll get along fine. You're going to have plenty of friends." Personality? Shit, I'd better see if one had fallen into my purse somewhere. Back in Ohio I'd been just another nerdy girl.

I finally calmed down enough to ask, "Is Bob attached? With what he's got going for him, he's probably got 15 or 20 girls on a string."

Sherry sobered up some. "Bob's only dated a little. *I've* dated him before, but there doesn't seem to be the right kind of chemistry between us — you know what I mean. You'll learn about the Bob Seal of Approval sometime, but it has little to do with a serious relationship. I don't think Bob's ever been in a serious relationship since I've known him.

"Don't get me wrong; Bob really appreciates women. He's got the normal guy's appreciation of T and A, but he's still looking for Miss Right and isn't going to settle for anyone else. No, he's not attached."

I asked, "Do you think Bob would want to be my boy-who-is-a-friend?"

Sherry looked at me seriously now. "I saw what happened between you two twice now. That's never happened to him before so far as I know. Girls have had crushes on him before, but he's never had an interest for someone. He's *always* treated them with dignity and respect and has managed to divert them to someone who fits their personality without offending them in any way.

“In this case, from what I’ve seen, it’s probable he’ll say yes. In the worst case, we’ll introduce you to someone else who fits you as a friend, and you won’t get hurt. All I can say right now is to ask him.”

Don Matthews

Ana Shanahan and I had met about 6 years ago and had gotten married a year after that. Ana was a great girl, and we’d hit it off wonderfully.

Samuel Shanahan, her previous husband, had died in a military accident about 10 years before. Of course she missed him, she’s human after all, but it’s never been an issue between us. Yes, I’ve held her while she cried out more of her grief, but it’s both my job and my privilege as a husband.

Ana’s daughter Natalie was a fine young lady. She inherited Ana’s Black Irish looks and accent, and in a few years it’ll be even harder to tell who’s the mother and who’s the daughter.

Natalie called me Don, and when she felt particularly in need of a father, Dad. I couldn’t have asked for a better relationship with any offspring.

Through my contacts and referrals in the Ohio school, I was able to get a teaching job at McCambridge — Chemistry and Physics. It has an Honors program, but I didn’t have the seniority to get any of those classes yet.

So, we were in a new state, new town, new school and hopefully a new life. After Ohio, the fresh start and environment would help.

Ana, Natalie and I had met with Rose Baer, the Women's Counselor, both all together and individually. Rose is definitely aware of Ana's problem, and is tight-mouthed enough so it wouldn't get around.

Natalie got into all the Honors classes available to her as a Senior. Her GPA was more than sufficient, but it didn't hurt I'd gotten rave-recommendation letters from her Ohio teachers before we left. Bless our little nerdette, she's a sweetheart!

Natalie, Ana and I all agreed on the policy that Natalie would be at school and at home only with no dating or extra-curricular activities. Ana cried over it, but her fear was still too great to be able to worry (as mothers do) over her daughter, too.

I knew Natalie didn't care for the policy but had agreed to follow it. She understood what was going on with her mother and supported her entirely. She's the kind of person who may not like an agreement, but once she agrees, she supports it wholeheartedly both in letter and spirit. She even volunteered to wear her hide-all clothes and no makeup or jewelry so as not to attract attention.

I worried about Natalie but not the same way Ana did. We trusted her intelligence, ethics and good sense not to hook up with a bad crowd, but at almost-eighteen, I wanted her to have a boyfriend, have fun and be a real teenager.

She'd never had a boyfriend in Ohio. She'd had a few dates while we were there, but we'd agreed the entire school didn't have a single guy worth looking at. They (and the girls) had all been into cliques, nasty gossip and peer-pressure stuff. Being a teacher, I heard about most of them. "Days of Our Lives" had nothing on *that* school.

Even before Ana had her problem, we'd discussed moving to California. Both of Ana's parent's lived in Glendale (mine are both gone), and we'd visited them a few times so we'd decided the move from Ohio to California would be the best for all of us.

Rose Baer had told us they did have a few little snobby cliques here and there, but they weren't really important in the overall "scheme of things." We'd discussed the school climate with her and decided to give it our best shot.

Ana and Natalie got the new-to-us house set up while I went to the school and got my classes, schedules and programs set up. I was at the house when the movers brought all the furniture in, so it wasn't any problem. Ana had locked the doors while I was gone so she'd felt safe enough.

The first day of school, I walked Natalie in and wished her good luck. She looked a little nervous, but then again, so was I.

There were standard first-day classes all day. How the grading works, homework, passing out the books; basic stuff.

I was pleasantly surprised at the students. They appeared happy, attentive and enthusiastic. I only saw one or two hard-metal types the whole day.

I mentioned this to Rose when we met in the teacher's lounge at lunch. She just laughed and said, "Oh, we have a few secret weapons around here," and wouldn't say much more about it.



When Natalie met me after school for the drive home, she was grinning ear-to-ear. I knew she was bursting to talk, but we just chatted until we got home and could get Ana to share it, too.

We got through all the locks on the front door, and Natalie flew in calling, "Mom, Mom, it's so nice!" and gave her a really happy hug. Ana gave us one of her rare smiles.

Natalie just chattered away while I grinned. "Right after my first class this couple just *accosted* me," wiggling her eyebrows, "and welcomed me and just *insisted* I have lunch with them."

She giggled (and she doesn't do that much). "Oh, my, they just put me on the rack and made me confess. They asked if I was a nerd or a socialite. I finally told them I was a nerd, but I could dance a little bit.

"They laughed and Bob said — Bob's soo nice — he said, 'Great answer!' They told me no matter what kind of person I was, they'd get me hooked up with the right people for *me*.

"And Bob's friends with Sherry and George. George came along right after we got to the table — he's a nerd too and funny. I'd thought Bob and Sherry were a couple, but Sherry sat me across from her next to Bob. George came and sat beside Sherry; they looked at each other for a bit and Bob said, 'These two are doing a line'. They just went into this hilarious impression of a couple falling in love right then and there and going all moony over it. They're really nice.

"Later Sherry told me they were the 'Brain Trust' and they were all nerds, too. She told me they always try to hook up someone new with a girl-who-is-a-friend and a boy-who-is-a-friend; people who'd match my personality and who I could talk with and get oriented. I asked Sherry to be my girl-who-is-a-friend, and she said she'd be honored, and we high-fived and laughed and everything."

Ana and I looked at each other and grinned... and Ana with a grin nowadays was a sight to cherish. We'd not seen Natalie this happy? bouncy? perky? — all those good words — in years. It looked as if things were off to a great start!

We chatted away for another half hour or so and got dinner done. I contributed my few words (against lots of Natalie's) about the school's

atmosphere, the type of students I'd seen and even mentioned what Rose had said about their "secret weapons."

Sherry

(Thursday 9/8)

Natalie looked really happy this morning. George and I caught her going to our first class so we chattered away. Bob got in just under the bell, but we still managed to sit together.

Bob and I got Natalie between us so she couldn't escape (a joke, just in case you didn't notice). She sure didn't look as if she wanted to escape. Almost every time I glanced at them during class, they were paying attention all right, but they were constantly touching.

George and I do it; most couples do it without realizing. Bob and Natalie were doing it knowingly. They would have their elbows together then maybe a foot against one another's, or a shoulder. All very light touches, but I knew how nice those seemingly casual contacts could feel. The Touch Game was on!

Natalie

First period was such fun! The teacher was interesting, but Bob and I got this little touching game going. It was quiet and casual but nice. I'd ease my hand real slowly over towards him, and he'd slip his hand over

towards mine. We'd inch towards each other for a minute then maybe the ends of our little fingers would touch lightly; just enough to feel.

We'd stay that way for several minutes, intently listening to the teacher and apparently being absorbed in the lesson. But at least on my part, my attention was maybe half on what the teacher was saying.

It felt really comfortable, as if we were old friends who liked to be close. I'd flick a glance at him, and he'd have this little twitch in his nostrils like he was trying not to laugh.

Then we'd slowly draw apart and act really nonchalant for a while — we'd glance at each other and play Mister and Miss Innocence. Then he'd start something like crossing his legs and slipping his foot slowly against my leg. After he felt my leg, he'd twitch his foot, like he was nudging me.

We played the game all period, alternating being the "aggressor" and trying to come up with some other way of casually touching the other. So much fun!

Bob

It was the first time I'd played the Touch Game. The objective was to be as seemingly unaware of doing it as possible, yet get the most pleasure from it. I'd seen other couples do it, but I think we did it the best!

I'm empathic; apparently I got it from Father. I'm able to feel or sense what people were experiencing emotionally and even pick up a thought or

image every once in a while. It's both a blessing and curse; I'm able to control it fairly well, but the sense was always available.

I guess it's like a stereo; you could have it on some background music and seem to tune it out, but if one of your favorites or something unusual came up, you'd become aware of it and turn the volume up for a while.

I didn't know if Natalie felt my happiness, but I sure felt hers. If she could purr like a contented kitten, she would have broken our eardrums with the volume and rattled the room like an earthquake.

I'd never gelled with anyone this quickly and closely. It seemed we were two different chords which came together, complemented and reinforced each other until they filled the world with the sound of our joy.

Corny? Well, yes... and so what if it was? It was something totally new to both of us, I'm sure. We didn't get lost in each other like we did yesterday, but it felt as if we were **touching** mentally and in some ways it was more intense since we were able to control the time, depth and pace.

I decided not to analyze it to death; I'd think about it later during one of my routine jobs like sanding or painting. For now, I decided to enjoy it as long as possible.

Sherry

They were still going at it during lunch. They were probably playing footsies under the table while we ate. Then, while we were all talking

away afterwards, they ended up shoulder-to-shoulder (and probably hip-to-hip, too). Just barely touching; it seemed as if they tried to do it as lightly as possible but still feel the contact.

George caught on quickly after I nudged him and flicked my eyes towards their hands creeping towards one another's. I slid my foot over towards George's, and we played the Touch Game, too.

I thought Bob must be able to project his empathy. I felt the energy flowing back and forth between them like the gentle waves of the tide coming in, going higher and higher.

To someone outside, it probably looked as if we were doing our normal lunch routine, discussing the chances of this year's football and basketball teams, upcoming Drama Club and band events, dances, rallies and other fun stuff.

Bob, George and I had known each other for years and had become a really effective team. Natalie had appeared yesterday, today had slipped into our group, and she fit perfectly. She seemed to add the final piece to us, like a finishing stroke to a painting turning it from merely pretty to beautiful.

I guess I was the lookout. I usually flittered around the school talking, listening and bringing back information. George was the First Mate, in charge of keeping loose ends from getting too loose.

Natalie, it seemed, added a layer of aesthetics with her sensuality, grace and beauty (even if she dressed like a Goodwill-store reject) which I'd never seen in someone who appeared so innocent, and an outside view.

Bob was the Captain and Navigator, who was our rock-solid foundation and who orchestrated us (I'm mixed-race, so I'm allowed to mix my metaphors, too!).

From then on, I noticed any two of us had a heightened energy when we were together. Add a third and it really increased. When the fourth one joined in, we felt complete.

Bob

Lunch was great. Natalie and I played with towards-and-away from each other; we'd see just how close it took to feel or touch the other. The physical touch was wonderful, but the bonding, energy or emotional and spiritual contact was even better.

Every time she spoke with her lilting Irish accent, we seemed to become more and more aware of each other. Is this what it was like to be in love?

What I felt between Natalie and me was different from George and Sherry. With George and Sherry, I got a feeling of pride, of belonging to something which extended beyond me. With Natalie, I felt whole, like I'd found another part of me I'd never known I'd missed or even had existed, and we wanted to push each other up as high as we could.

Natalie

Lunch that day was the happiest I'd ever been. I recognized the feeling. Before Mom had her troubles, she, Dad and I used to sit around the dining table, living room or den and just talk, laugh and enjoy being together as a family.

Well, some things must end. The lunch warning bell clanged, and we dutifully trotted off to our classes like good proles.

Bob and I played the Touch Game, both physically and mentally, in the other classes where we were together. We kept the volume down considerably, though. I guess we were learning to control what was happening between us, and it was even more exciting than the first couple of times. We kept it down to a dull roar instead of a cheering crowd.



While I was chatting with Sherry before our last class, I dug around in my purse for a pen and touched something strange. It was a CD in a paper envelope. I took it out; it was labeled, "Natalie" with today's date.

I sure hadn't put it there. I showed it to Sherry and asked, "Any idea what this is?"

She looked at it and said cautiously, as if it were a trick question, "A CD-R. Burned in a home computer."

Jaysus, I knew that! "Not what it is, just what is it doing in my purse? I didn't put it there and have no idea where it came from."

She looked at it again. She shrugged and turned her hands out in mystery. "All I can say is it looks like Bob's printing, but I won't guarantee it." She got a mischievous look in her eyes and whispered, "Maybe it's some pictures of nude Bob doing *it* to a wall with a paint roller! Or some raunchy photos of the construction crew working with their... tools."

I just rolled my eyes and groaned. On the other hand, nude Bob pictures? Could be *very* interesting.

She smirked with a lifted eyebrow, "Just shove it in your CD drive and see what it is. Do it in private, just in case."

Sounded good to me. A mystery can be fun.

Don

Natalie and I stopped for a few groceries on the way home. We chatted a bit like we usually did, but she didn't appear as bubbly as she was yesterday.

When I looked a little closer, she seemed more serene, more in control and had a little smile suggesting all was right with the world.

I asked her casually, "Have a good day?"

She told me, "Not a good day at all. It was a *wonderful* day!" Her smile must have caused sunburn for several aisles around.

After we got home and had put the groceries away, she came over and gave me a firm hug. She whispered earnestly, "Dad, I love Mom and I love you. I want us back together again like we were before." She frowned a bit then said, "No, actually, I want us better than before. I felt today what a friendly and loving group could be and I want it for us.

"I know we've just been letting Mom 'get over it' and giving her our support. We need to think of a way to be more — I guess it would be causative or proactive — instead of reactive. We need to find a way to make her feel more her own person, more special, not just the effect or reaction of what happened to her. Can we get a plot going, a conspiracy, to help her become more herself than she's ever been?"

I gave her a hug back. "You *are* her brilliant daughter. I agree; it's time we took some action instead of waiting around."

She told me, "Well, even with all the work we've had moving here, I think it was a great idea. The people are friendlier, they're excited and enthusiastic, the weather is great and Mom seems less, well, 'moody,' I guess is the best way to put it."

I agreed. "It's a deal. Although we're still getting settled here in the house and at school, we need to start finding resources, ways of getting her attention... actually all our attentions, more outside of us. It seems as

if we've collapsed into 'us' with all our problems and 'them,' who we view with some fear."

I told her firmly, "We've got to change it somehow. We used to visit other families a lot, have some fun parties, and, while still being a family, be part of the rest of the world. I want it, too, just as you do."

Natalie

After getting ready for bed, I discovered the CD again. Although I was very curious, I put it off until I got my homework done.

Okay, the homework was a done deal. The computer was already on, so I slid the CD into the tray and closed it. Windows hemmed and hawed a bit and popped up Media Player with an audio CD. Hmm, Track 1 of 1 seemed the best choice. I clicked on Play and heard "Welcome to My World" in a deep, rich voice.

Welcome to my world
Won't you come on in
Miracles, I guess
Still happen now then.

...

Knock and the door will open
Seek and you will find
Ask and you'll be given
The key to this world of mine.

I'll be waiting here
With my arms unfurled
Waiting just for you
Welcome to my world.

...

I put it on infinite repeat. I cried happy tears because Bob had asked me to join him and sad tears because I could see no way it could happen.

Finally, I turned it off and stumbled into bed. I had strange dreams of joy and of sorrow and didn't remember which won.

Bob
(Friday 9/9)

Friday, Natalie and I played the Touch Game a bit. She seemed a bit preoccupied and felt worried, so I didn't push it. Even so, I felt wonderful.

At lunch, Sherry had ducked off somewhere, and George hadn't arrived yet, so Natalie and I were alone at our foursome table. We chatted and touched a bit; such a nice feel-good.

After a couple of minutes, I mentally focused in, took a breath, put my hand over hers on the table and looked directly at her. "Natalie, these past few days I've felt... no, experienced, a very nice connection between us, and I feel it's definitely worth following up. Do you have any thoughts on that?"

She looked back at me and smiled. "You were the one who gave me the CD, aren't you? Sherry said it looked like your printing."

I confessed, "Yes, I felt the words were mine, but Jim Reeves could deliver them better. You *are* welcome to my world."

She smiled a bit painfully, it seemed. "It seems I'm in there whether or not I want to be," she said softly, "I'm ecstatic, but at the same time I'm afraid."

"Oh, I know what you're going through," I responded, "I've never had this intense a connection before. I'm very empathic and can actually sense what others feel at times. Sometimes I can even step outside myself and sense what I'm feeling, as if I were external to myself.

"Even with couples who appear to be totally compatible and happy with each other — even adults — I've never sensed the intenseness or the completeness I've experienced with you. *I* am cautious because I don't know what's caused it. I guess it's like having dessert before the main course — it's sweet, it's good but one can't survive on the dessert alone.

"I want the full fifteen-course dinner, the whole enchilada; I want it all, not just the dessert. I want to find out your favorite color... perhaps why your nose crinkles before you giggle, where the little scar I've never seen comes from, why you seem to drift off and look sad for a while, and how you've trained your freckles to be so adorable.

"I need to *know* you, not just a great feel-wonderful but to find out if we're compatible, to know if we're going in the same direction.

"We've known each other for only two days now, but with what we've experienced together, it seems like a long time. Natalie, would you go out with me for a Coke, coffee, dinner, whatever... so we can get to know each other better and to explore the chance we fit together?"

She pulled her hand back a little and looked unhappy. I didn't dare get too close and look at her for fear I'd **fall** into her again. Fear? I'd love to get close to her, but it wouldn't help out right now. So, I edged back a bit and put on my best "listen" face. "Natalie, what's going on?"

She looked and felt as if she were going to cry. "I've got something to tell you and ask you. Is that all right?"

I smiled a little, "Sure it's all right. What's on your mind?" Out of the corner of my eye, I saw George coming over, so I gave him our wave-off signal. He picked it up, set his brown bag down in his spot and went on by.

Natalie looked at me and said, "Yes, we've only known each other for two days now, but I too have already experienced many times there's something going on between us — just like you said. I don't know what it is; it isn't just lust, it doesn't feel like infatuation, but I know it's something intense."

I nodded and kept my mouth shut. Let her get out what she needed to.

She went on, "I've never felt this way about someone before, either." She looked miserable. "My heart tells me to grab onto it and run, but..." She definitely had tears now. "I've got a major family situation where I can't date anyone, go out with any groups or anything like that. It's school and home, that's it. No extra-curricular stuff, nada. It's like I'm grounded for life.

"It has nothing to do with whether or not my parents trust me or because of something I did. It's basically an external influence, but I have no idea when or even if it'll be resolved. I can't tell you what it is right now; the only thing I *can* say — and it probably won't help any — is it's one of the reasons we came to California."

I just nodded again. I saw more tears and felt her despair coming off in waves. I kept my attention focused on what she was saying.

She continued brokenly, "I don't know if I could stand even being around you feeling this way, but I'd like to try. If I can seal this off, it should be okay. Sherry's agreed to be my girl-who-is-a-friend. If it wouldn't be too

much of a burden on you and we can keep things platonic between us, would you be my boy-who-is-a-friend?"

Natalie

I did manage to get it all out without totally breaking down and bawling. All I could do then was wait.

I saw him tighten up then slowly relax. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes (yes, he had tears, too) then blew his nose.

He finally said, "I gather if you could explain it to me, I would understand. But if you did explain it, you'd be violating your family's privacy. Am I correct in thinking that?"

"You've got it exactly right," I whispered, "I'm sorry I can't say more."

"I think you've got the right priorities right now," he said. "I know when people are our age, we think we're so independent, but, to most of us, our family and getting through school usually has the highest importance. Things outside may seem more important but it's up to the person involved. You seem to have the same priorities I do. By the way, that's a sincere compliment if you didn't get it."

He finally looked over at me with no expression at all. I felt things just going through his mind. Finally he said, "I can understand the problem for both of us. However, I don't think we should deny our feelings, but we can and must control them. I say we don't suppress them but

acknowledge they *are* there and put them to the side. More as an investment we can nurture and make grow rather than a short-term pleasure.

“I’d be the stupidest fool in the world to let this go by so long as there’s the faintest hope it could work out. The potential upside seems unlimited. The alternative seems to be worse — we could get you hooked up with other friends, avoid each other and hope the feelings die away. We’d probably never know what could have been, and I, for one, would be wondering ‘what if’ for a long, long time.

“We should try to grow into those feelings, not have them as just the dessert. Besides, we know the dessert is there now and most couples can only hope it will *ever* be there.

“Natalie, I would be delighted and privileged to be your boy-who-is-a-friend. If you can deal with these ideas, so can I,” he said with his big Bob smile I’d seen before.

Said like the nerds we were. He stuck out his hand and we had the best “friendly” shake we could — with a warm **touch**.

I hadn’t totally soaked my top with tears. I dug out my tissues from my purse and got the face mopped up and the nose blown. I’d worn no makeup anyway, so all I had to worry about was my red eyes. That should be the least of my worries!

I saw Bob make a gesture to the rest of the cafeteria; George and Sherry magically appeared and sat down, looking concerned.

Bob told them, "I've agreed to be Natalie's boy-who-is-a-friend. We've got some issues, but we think it's worthwhile to handle them."

He looked at me and said, "Natalie, if you wish, you may talk with either of these guys about anything we've discussed. I trust them both totally without any reservations."

George and Sherry gave me the warmest smiles I've ever gotten from anyone except Bob. They made me feel welcomed and loved.

☞☞

Chapter 2

Don

(Friday 9/9)

Ana got tired after dinner, so Natalie and I cleaned up and did the dishes while she took a nap. After we were done, Natalie asked, "Don, can we have a 'Dad' talk? I'm worried about some things."

Of course I agreed, so we went into the den and shut the door. She was looking worried, so I asked gently, "What is it, Natalie?"

She said, "Well, it's sorta 'girl stuff,' but I can't really talk with Mom about this while she's feeling as she is, so can you bear with me?"

"I'll do my best."

"Well, it's about Brain-Trust Bob. You know we laugh about going by warm-and-fuzzy instead of thinking things out? Well, on Wednesday when Sherry introduced me to Bob, he took my hand and... well ... it just seemed as if we fell into each other. Like all the warm-and-fuzzy feelings and... Jaysus, this is hard to say ... not hard to tell you but hard to put

into words... I felt complete? totally happy? content? wrapped around and through each other? All of the above.

"It happened again at lunch, too. We didn't even touch each other, and it happened again. Sherry threatened to take a bucket of water to us. She told me later she'd known him for years and that had never happened with him before.

"Yeh, there was a bit of sex feeling there, too," she blushed a little as she seemed to think of something, "I mean objectively he's probably not all that good-looking... he's not a 'hunk', you know? But still..."

"Yesterday and this morning, Bob and I played the Touch Game... ya know, where you touch someone and look so innocent but feel so good inside? Today, we talked about these feelings we seem to have about each other... he said we *need* to get to know each other better besides having all these wonderful feelings... and he asked me out on a date."

I groaned inside. I'd wanted her to find a nice boy and have fun, but under the circumstances with Ana, I knew Natalie was really in a bind. I knew about those warm-and-fuzzy feelings; Ana and I had them once, too.

She said, "I told him basically I was grounded for life, but it really wasn't anything to do with me — it was an external influence on the family.

"Somehow, I don't know how, he managed to take everything and make me feel good about keeping our family's privacy. I told him I could probably seal away these feelings and still be friends and asked him if he could be my boy-who-is-a-friend."

"Jeez," I said, "it's got to be tough for both of you."

"Well, he said, 'No'."

"God, Honey, I'm so sorry for you," I whispered.

"Oh, no, Dad, he said 'No' to trying to deny or seal away the feelings we have. He got nerdy on me like I do sometimes and said it was a good investment; we should put it to the side and keep it growing. He said he'd rather have a relationship based on knowing each other, rather than just having the dessert.

"He said he'd be 'delighted and privileged' to be my boy-who-is-a-friend! And somehow it all turned out there's a chance of having things even better than we have now!

"Dad, we've really got to do something about Mom. I think I've been very supportive of her problem, but it's gotten really personal to me. I don't want to sound like a 'teenager in love' but these past few days I discovered I really wanna be happy myself."

Natalie
(Monday 9/12)

Over the next several days, Bob, George and Sherry introduced me to just about everyone in the school. The Brain Trust was mainly a lot of tutors, but the network went beyond that. They helped people, encouraged them, helped handle situations and even did match-making! Bob said that he, George and Sherry had gotten more into people-matching than tutoring, since they knew just about everyone — and everyone knew them.

Most of the students I talked with on my own called the three of them the “Inner Circle.” Apparently, they were among the most respected students in the school; even the most rabid jocks had only good words to say about them. The Brain Trust had tutored or were tutoring most of them or had gotten them fixed up in a great relationship!

Sherry
(Tuesday 9/13)

Lots of things happened during lunch period. Around the second week of school, Leone Zadok came strutting over to our foursome. She’s a medium-height, gorgeous Jewish girl with long, straight black hair, a barely-legal skirt, a pink cashmere V-neck sweater and a perfect chest. She was a really nice, smart girl but can put on a great show.

She smiled at us. “The Sherry! Hey, Sorcerer!”

“Leone!” he replied with a big grin, “How was your summer?”

She went straight into her routine. She whined and pouted, “I was so lonely.” I could see Natalie was probably thinking something like, “Whoa, boy! What is this?”

Leone bent over, set her elbows on the table and looked right into Bob’s eyes. She arched her back, wiggled her butt and pouted, “Can you fix me up?”

Bob knew her routine, so he said, “I’ll see what I can do.”

Leone wiggled her shoulders and chest and “managed” to let her sweater fall away from her (*very-nice*) cleavage. If the little strip of fabric I saw was a bra, it sure wasn’t doing its job in a supporting role. If her sweater waist had been much looser, Bob probably could’ve seen through to the floor.

“How about you, Sorcerer? Are *you* available?” She pursed her lips, made a kissy-kiss at him and batted her eyelashes.

Natalie

What in the world was this girl doing? I could see what she was doing, but was she making a pass at Bob? I could see her nipples were perked up and I was four feet behind Bob.

Bob hadn't taken his eyes off hers but just grinned at her. "Sorry, Leone," he replied and made a big backwards gesture with his head towards me. "I'm quite committed right now. This is my very special friend, Natalie Shanahan. Natalie, Leone Zadok -- the Voice of Burbank."

Oh, gushy stuff. I felt my heart pick up speed in a hurry. Leone moved her head around Bob a bit and looked me right in the eyes. She gave me a bright, warm smile and told me, "Finally! That's wonderful," and smiled again. No Princess act there!

Sherry

When Bob said he was committed and Natalie was very special, I knew they had something more going than just "friends." He'd usually say he wasn't in the market right now or something similar.

Leone told Bob, "Nice lady," very sincerely then went right back into her Princess act, wiggled her butt and boobs again, and whined at him, "Then fix me up with someone nice -- Billy and his family moved to Illinois over the summer and I'm *lonely*."

Bob deadpanned, "Male or female?"

Although I hadn't thought it possible, Leone arched her back more and stuck her boobs out more. "What kind of girl do you think I am?" She fixed him with her best Princess glare.

Bob grinned a little and shrugged. "*Chest* checking. Can't be sure in this modern age."

Now Bob doesn't just glance at something, he *looks* at it. He didn't flick his eyes down her sweater; he overtly dropped his whole head and stared down at her offerings. He cocked his head back and forth a few times, pursed his lips and nodded in admiration a few times. From the corner of my eye, I saw Natalie start to steam.

He looked at her forearms and reached out towards one. "Not to be personal..." and squeezed one lightly a few times." Golf? Tennis?" he asked, looking back at her face.

"Oh, golf. I like to play with balls," she smirked. "And make him smart. I need *lots* of intensive tutoring," with another wiggle.

Natalie

I don't know many guys who'd have the guts to take up a girl offering her charms the way Bob did, but he carried it off with aplomb. He pulled out his PDA and told her, "Well, Hon, scoot your cute fanny around here, and we'll get some data." She twitched her butt around until she was beside him looking over his shoulder at the PDA.

Bob flicked a look at me, and I could see his nostrils flutter with his suppressed laughter as we shared the language double-entendre: "fanny" is the female genitals in Irish/British slang.

He asked her, "You need a 'nice Jewish boy' or just someone with some get-up-and-goy?" Ugh, bad pun.

She grinned and smacked him with her hip. "A goy guy is just fine."

Now George was getting an eyeful or is it both eyes full? He wasn't quite as blatant as Bob had been, but he was definitely looking down her sweater.

Bob got her email address and phone number noted down and told her, "I've got a few guys in mind. How about I check out a few things and drop you an email. If you don't get one from me by tomorrow evening, nudge me. I assume you want an introduction?"

Leone said, "An intro would be nice. Make sure he knows he has to *tutor* me. If I don't hear from you, I'll be back the next day and *nudge* you." She swung her hip into him again.

Bob acted like he'd been knocked half-way off his seat, raised his hands in surrender and laughed, "Okay, I'll make sure I do it."

Leone dropped her act for a bit, "Thanks, Bob. You are the best." She looked over at me and told me sincerely, "May you two find a world of happiness and joy together." She strutted away like the models do — with one foot crossing in front of the other, making her ass sway.

Bob and George watched appreciatively as she left. About ten feet away, Leone looked back over her shoulder and blew a kiss at them. Bob called

out, "By the way, Leone, nice belly-button ring!" She gave him another smile and blew a kiss.

Bob shook his head and laughed. He turned to George and said, "Never let it be said I don't share goodies with my friends." He'd deliberately maneuvered Leone around so George could get his share of the view, too.

Sherry

I grinned to myself. George could look all he wanted, but I had quality boobs myself and they were *much* more available. Leone was a tease but was so up-front about it no one took offense. If they did, tough darts.

Natalie fell for Bob's comment, "How did you know she had a belly-button ring?"

George and I gave her our best dumb-question looks. I asked her, "What do you think Bob was looking at?" Bob looked around with the innocent look he can put on so well — but his nostrils were fluttering.

She stuttered, "Well, her, ah... she's so..."

"Well-endowed?" I offered.

Bob and George started in, "Tremendous Tahtahs"

"Munchy Mammaries"

"Honeyed Hooters"

“Fine Fundament”

Natalie tossed in, “Perfect Pudendum?”

Bob and George immediately assumed terrified looks, threw their hands in the air and said shakily, “I wouldn’t know anything about *that!*”

I gave George a good one on his arm and told him, “You’d better not.”

I saw Natalie beat Bob’s shoulder a few times with her little fist. “You, either!” She flexed her hand a few times, shook it and exclaimed, “You’re hard as a rock!”

Bob slowly swiveled his head to look right at her and whispered, “It’s because *you’re* here.”

Natalie’s eyes got really big, and she was so surprised she almost fell off her seat. Bob does have a way with words.

Bob turned back to George and said, “Hard, huh?” He made a come-on, your-turn gesture with his hand.

My George is so good! He “rose” to the occasion.

“It’s why they call us the Hardy Boys.”

Bob said, “But if you get a grip on yourself, you should be able to stick it out.”

“Handle things right and you’ll come through.”

“Let’s get a few things straight...”

“I still have an Erector Set.”

“I get pumped up about things.”

Ooo, I could imagine quite a few things, myself, the way they were talking. My nipples were crinkled up and my crotch was so wet I squirmed. I saw Natalie squirming around, too. I’ll bet she was perked up too, even through the industrial-strength bra she wore. Bet she was wet after what Bob had said to her; I sure would have been.

Natalie

God, his muscles were hard as a rock. I upped my estimate of his hunkiness quite a few notches. And when he said he was hard because I was there, I soaked my panties — again.

Then they went into the dick puns! I had images of Bob running through my head; him naked, hard and with me!

Bob finally took a deep breath, raised his hands in a “stop” motion and said, “Enough of the dick jokes.”

Sherry pretended to glare at them, “You guys are so lame!”

Bob couldn’t resist a last come-back, “Lame? It *should* make me limp then, right?”

Okay, we laughed. Bob got a puzzled look and took a big sniff through his nose. "No offense to our cooks, but I don't think the smell is the cafeteria food."

Between Sherry and me, I think there were enough female pheromones and scent in the air to create a fog. I saw George take a few sniffs, raise an eyebrow and grin a little.

Bob leaned forward towards him and asked, "George, what *is* that smell?"

George just opened his mouth and out it came, "It's wet puss..." then stuttered a bit, "I don't know."

Sherry was struggling to keep her mouth shut. She was blushing too. Sherry blush at anything? Yep, if they weren't "doing the deed" now, they sure had been working up to it.

Bob asked very solicitously, "George, is there something you need to tell Natalie and me?"

Now both were blushing and looking anywhere but at each other or at Bob and me. I had to put in my bid, "An Australian connection maybe? Going Down Under? I double-dog dare you two to look at each other!"

They finally glanced at each other and burst out laughing. Sherry laughed so hard she probably peed her panties to add to the other stuff in them.

Bob said, "Well, I guess there are some things which don't need to be said and are best left to the imagination."

I chimed in with, "Yes and we have quite a bit of imagination." I looked them over with a big smirky leer while nodding my head wisely.

George and The Sherry shook their heads in defeat and packed up their lunch stuff. Sherry told George, "That mouth of yours..."

George shot back with a raised eyebrow, "I know it's good for at least one thing." It got Sherry even redder. They put on their "defeated" act and slunk away.

Bob and I looked at each other and did a big standing high-five. "Yess! The Irish win again!" I felt liquid dripping down my leg through my panty liner.

Don (Wednesday 9/14)

I watched Natalie over the weekend and a of couple days the next school week. She went between happy, not-happy then back again. Wednesday I figured I had to bite the bullet (yes, I'd been in the Navy) and talk with Rose Baer about this. Natalie and I hadn't given Ana a clue about what was going on with Bob beyond the "friends with the Brain Trust," but something needed to be done.

I cornered Rose in the teacher's lounge at lunch. "Rose, you got a minute? I need to chat a bit."

She said, "Sure, what's on your mind?"

"It's about Natalie and Bob."

"Bob?"

"Yeh, the Brain Trust guy. I know nothing about him and Natalie's told me she'd gotten these intense feelings with, for, about, whatever combination since the first moment she met him. She's been hanging out with the Brain Trust since the first day of school."

Rose just looked at me. "Hmm, what do you want to know?"

"Well, to start with, is he an okay guy? He's not one of my students, so I've never met him myself."

Rose looked at me with one of those grins which had "inside joke" written all over it. "Well, let's find out." She turned to the rest of the teachers in the lounge — about a dozen — and said loudly, "Hey guys, this is Don Matthews; Chemistry and Physics. He's got a concern about one of our male students and his daughter Natalie. How about a Vote of Confidence for Bob Reynolds as A-Number-One Good Guy!"

It was an amazingly fast reaction. Every hand in the room, including Rose's, shot up immediately with a thumbs-up salute. Rose said, "Thank you guys," and turned to me, "Is that a good start?"

I couldn't do anything but look at her blankly. She glanced at her watch and said, "Well it's almost time for class. You have a free period this afternoon?"

I said I had 6th period free. Rose said, "Then drop by my office, and we'll have a talk about the Bob Reynolds phenomenon and see if we can ease your mind a little bit." I agreed.



At the start of my free 6th period, I hot-footed it over to Rose's office and dropped into her interview chair. "I'm here."

Rose asked, "Well, Don, what did you think of the Vote of Confidence?"

"Enlightening. What's the Brain Trust thing?"

She informed me, "It's a wide-spread group of about fifty student tutors, with lots of friends and networking going on inside and out. Every one of them has excellent grades, zero drugs, zero alcohol, zero discipline problems and are a joy to be around."

"There's an Inner Circle around Bob. It's ranged from two, Bob and George, to about six at one time. It's a foursome right now; Bob, George,

Sherry and at least for the time being, Natalie. Don, for someone to last a week in the Inner Circle is an achievement like getting a medal in the Olympics.”

I told her, “Wow, I guess that is something. I know Natalie talks about him very enthusiastically. I don’t think she says anything to Ana about him; you know why.

“Even if I’m not a dirty old man with my daughter, when she talks about him she gets all softy-eyed and I can see her, ah, yeh...”

Rose laughed. “Don, I’ve had lots of girls in here for interviews. There’s lots of perky nipples whenever Bob gets mentioned, and I’ve had to air out the office a few times, too.”

“I’d bet 95% of the nice girls in this school would jump Bob’s bones in a second if he even hinted at it. Yet, he’s a perfect gentleman. He doesn’t lead any of them on or make them feel put down when he turns them down. He puts the burden on himself and somehow makes them feel good about themselves when he does. You had peer pressure back in Ohio?”

I confirmed, “Yes, indeed. Between peer pressure and the soap operas, it was a nightmare.”

Rose nodded and said, “Well, let me tell you about another kind of peer pressure. There was this girl, Janine. As a sophomore last year, she was

dowdy, had no self-esteem, was shy, didn't have a friend in the world according to her and her grades were Cs and Ds. Not a good start in the world, wouldn't you say?

"One day, Bob accidentally bumped into her and almost knocked her down. You might find out some time how really solid his body is. Anyway, he picked her up and apologized profusely. Then he looked at her and said, 'Janine, nice hair!' She was so surprised, she managed to smile. He then smiled at her and told her, 'Nice smile, too.' When Bob says something, you know if he's poking fun or being sincere. Well, he really meant it.

"Several more times the same day, someone complimented her on something; her hair, her smile, her hands, her eyes, just anything. All sincere, all totally unexpected.

"You see, Don, Bob's our main Opinion Leader. He's so respected his opinion really counts. It's like, 'Well, Bob said something good about it, I think I'll check it out,' and they usually find something good.

"Janine came to school the next day with neater clothes, her hair neatly done and a bit of makeup. Several of the Brain Trust girls chatted with her and everyone kept pushing her up about her looks, her smile and her personality.

"The nice guys started checking her out, too. You know how some guys undress a girl with their eyes? Well, these guys were just looking, admiring, and being appreciative.

"About the third day, Sherry grabbed her and introduced her to Todd Marks. Todd was about the perfect stereotype of the nerd; he had glasses, the pocket protector, weird hair, was shy and everything. Sherry told Janine, 'Todd's your study partner now. He'll help you get your grades up, and you can help him with his social skills.'

"Every grading period after, her grades went up a level. By the end of last year, she was getting As and Bs, not Cs and Ds. She's got lots of friends, laughs a lot and has loads of fun.

"Todd got a decent haircut, decent clothes and finally was able to carry on an intelligible social conversation. They started dating about the second month and they've been an item since then.

"Not bad for six words, eh, Don?"

I agreed, "Yeh, not bad at all."

"Don, Janine's my oldest daughter. Do you think it makes me biased towards Bob?"

We wiped our eyes. I agreed she was biased and for good reason.

"Then there's 'Sally Smith.' Somehow her birth control got compromised, and she got pregnant. She told only her best girlfriend but the girlfriend knew Bob and called him.

"He came over at one o'clock in the morning, cheered them up, got her to the clinic and helped her get it handled.

"That was two years ago when Bob was fifteen. To my knowledge, the only ones who know who the girl is and what happened are me, her girlfriend, Bob and the doctor. The only thing you know now is Bob had something to do with handling it. Do you know any other guy who has a tight lip like that?

"Bob always finds something positive and pushes people up. If there's something negative, he won't say or do anything but will find a way to get it handled without making the person feel wrong.

"He always treats people individually, as someone special. He has this tremendous empathy and seems to know how they're feeling. This includes the teachers, parents and adults. Everyone.

"If I'm feeling a bit down, he might come by and say something like, 'Hey, Mrs. B, nice shoes! They sure do keep your feet off the ground.' Totally banal, one might say, but very effective.

“Every once in a while, Bob or one of the Brain Trust will drop me or the Men’s Counselor an email and suggest we talk to so-and-so about such-and-such. Invariably it’s been a hot item and we’ve been able to help out.

“You know, Don, if you could somehow figure out a way to get Ana and Bob together, it would probably help her out a lot. He has that effect on people.”

Don

I told her, “Well, I think getting them together would be a great idea. I guess ‘how’ is the sticking point. If he and Natalie were dating, it would be natural for him to come over, but it’s kind of a Catch 22.”

Rose looked thoughtful for a bit then asked, “You own the house you moved into?”

I grinned at her. “Yes, bought it free and clear.”

“Great!” she told me. “There’s another thing about Bob...” She smiled.

I offered, “He’s secretly SpongeBob SquarePants?”

“Close but not quite. His parents own the Reynolds Construction company, and Bob’s been working in construction since before he could walk.

“Since you’re a teacher here now, you’re automatically part of his Faculty Circuit. He does part-time work with his family’s crews and also offers his services to the faculty at a big discount.

“Leaky faucet, leak in the roof, plumbing, wiring, painting, you name it. He’s not an Arnold in looks, but I’ve seen him horse an old water heater full of scale into the back of his truck without turning a hair — and those things gotta weigh upwards of three hundred pounds. Surely you’ve got some fix-up you’d like to do around your place.”

“Hmm... well, the dining room looks like it used to be a kid’s playroom — crayon marks, a few dents, picture-hanger holes, stuff like that. Ana said it looks pretty...”

Rose asked with a smile, “Scruffy?”

“Yep, scruffy describes it perfectly. Maybe getting it fixed up could kill two birds with one stone — get the dining room in good shape and get Ana to know a real nice guy.”

Rose smirked a little and said, “Besides, you could check out how he and Natalie act together — maybe it’ll soften up Ana a bit too.”

I laughed. “Hell, when Natalie started puberty, I worried about keeping her away from bad guys — then she never found anyone in Ohio even remotely interesting. Now here in California she’s found a guy she’s told

me several times she's really interested in, and you and I are plotting how to get them together! That's a switch."

Rose told me seriously, "Well I've talked with Bob a few times this school year, and whenever I 'happen' to mention Natalie, he gets this silly grin I've never seen on him before and starts staring off into space — I don't think you have to worry about him holding up his side of the bargain he doesn't know he's getting into.

"Okay, why don't you take some measurements of the dining room and casually mention to Ana you've got a line on someone who'll fix it up pretty cheaply. As I recall, Ana didn't seem to have any difficulty with the movers being there so long as you were there too, right?"

"No, she didn't. In fact, she got so into getting the stuff put in the right places she pushed a couple of them in the right direction."

"Great!" Rose said, "Activity is probably very good for her then. Now, let's keep this between you and me. Don't mention Bob's name or where he's from or anything to Natalie, and don't mention Natalie's name to Bob. With you and Natalie having different last names, he may not know you two are related. Maybe we can surprise them all a little."

I laughed at her. "You really are a sly devil, aren't you, Rose?"

"Yep! I've had to handle lots of lovesick teenagers in my years here, now I have to handle the opposite in an adult — and at long range, too.

“Okay, see if you can get your measurements and your womenfolk handled tonight. Bring the room measurements with you to school tomorrow, and I’ll drop a note to Bob to come see you. Sound like a plan?”

I agreed, “It’s a plan.”

In the evening, I casually mentioned to Ana about having found someone to help us out with the dining room so it wouldn’t be so “scruffy.” She didn’t have any problem with it at all, since I’d be there. In fact, she said she wanted her hand in on it so it would be up to her standards.

Bob **(Thursday 9/15)**

Mrs. Baer dropped me a note to see Mr. Matthews, the new Chemistry and Physics teacher, about some renovation work and suggested a time to see him. Sixth period, I told the study hall teacher where I was going and headed over to see him.

I looked in the chemistry lab, saw a man I didn’t know and assumed it was him. I rapped on the door jamb and called out, “Mr. Matthews? Bob Reynolds.”

He looked up and said, “Yes, I’m Mr. Matthews. Come on in, Bob.” He stood up and offered his hand.

We shook hands and he offered me the seat by his desk. Sitting down, I asked him, "Mrs. Baer said you had some renovation work you're looking at doing?"

"Yes, we moved into a new-to-us house less than a month ago, and already my wife wants some things done; you probably know how women are about that, right?"

I grinned at him and rolled my eyes a bit. "Yeh, most of the renovation projects my father's company gets are started by the women — they seem to want to make over the place their way."

He laughed, too. He was a nice-looking guy; probably mid-thirties, looked in good physical shape and felt very good. I asked him, "So what does she have in mind?"

"To start with, she's complained a few times about the dinning room being pretty scruffy — looks as if it had been a kid's playroom or something before — some crayon marks, a few dents, picture-frame shadows, ragged curtains, that sort of thing. I happened to mention it to Mrs. Baer, and she suggested you could help us out."

I told him, "Not a problem. The entire faculty gets our special rate, and I usually do the work unless it's really major. The client supplies the materials and I do the work."

"If you and your wife are willing to help some, the work will go faster, and it will cost you less for my labor. Think she'd be interested?"

"Sure, she already said she would, and we've got a teenager who's willing to work, too."

"Great! Since it's a new-to-you house, there'll probably be other rooms your wife will want fixed up too, especially when she sees how nice the dining room turns out. What I usually do in a case like this is 'apprentice' the family — teach them how to do the work themselves, show-and-tell the first job then help out only as needed on the rest. Does that sound like something your family would be interested in?"

He said, "You know, I think it would work perfectly for us."

"Excellent! Now, how big is this room?" He had the dimensions with him, so we made up a list of things he'd be supplying. I recommended a local hardware store I'd been dealing with, gave him my Reynolds Construction card and told him to give it to the cashier.

I told him, "Also, I'd recommend you take your wife along so she has the final say in the color, fixtures, curtains, all that sort of stuff. White paint comes in about fifty different shades, and if we guys pick out the 'wrong' one, they tend to get all huffy about it. If she's in on the planning, it will be her creation too, and she'll be much happier."

We arranged for me to come over to get started that evening then I went back to study hall to see if I could get in some **touching** with Natalie.

Don

I took Bob's suggestion and got Ana and Natalie involved in picking out the paint color, designs for new curtains and all the stuff women seem to love to do. We spent over an hour in the hardware store Bob had recommended getting paint, paint supplies and that kind of stuff. When I showed him Bob's card, the clerk immediately gave us a 15% courtesy discount. He does have some pull around town, it seems.

The evening finally rolled around and the next step in our conspiracy began. I got the ladies off getting into their grungiest clothes just before Bob was due to arrive so the coast was clear to smuggle him in.

He knocked on the door exactly to the minute he was scheduled. I let him in and took him right to the dining room. I'd told Natalie to hold back a bit and let her mom come in first; it might be easier on Ana if just she and I were there to start with.

When I got Bob into the dining room, he told me, "Since I don't really know your family, I talked with Mrs. Baer a bit about this. She told me to act like I always do — but it can be a bit outrageous at times. It seems to help the clients have fun, though.

“I ‘sing and dance,’ flirt a bit, and up to now, no one’s had any objections. However, since I don’t have any previous credibility with your family, I’ll keep an eye on you and if you give me the wave-off on something, I’ll stop it. Is that okay?”

I replied, “Perfect. My wife can do with a bit of cheering up and my daughter... well, you’ll find out for yourself. Just do what you normally do and we’ll all probably have fun.”

I noticed Ana just outside the door and motioned her in.

Ana

It’ll be really nice to get the dining room looking good. While we didn’t have plans to entertain, we ate there, so having it nice will benefit us, too.

I saw Don in the dining room talking softly to someone I couldn’t see — must be the painter. He noticed me and waved me on in.

I went in and stared at the guy. He had an old blue bandana over his hair and wore a paint-streaked boiler suit with old tennis shoes. (Surely lots of construction people wear a bandana and a boiler suit! That doesn’t mean anything, does it?)

But sticking out under the bandana was some glossy jet-black hair; he had piercing blue-green eyes and the Black Irish complexion. He glowed with life — I love Don more than life itself, but this guy was *gorgeous!*

He looked over at me with a great big smile and said, "Hello, you must be the lovely daughter Mr. Matthews has been bragging about." Be Jaysus! He had the Irish accent and blarney to go along with his looks, too!

Natalie came running into the room. She looked at him, stopped dead in her tracks then jumped up and down like a little girl. She squealed, "Bob!" — and Natalie doesn't "squeal."

He looked at her and his eyes bugged out. Don had managed to get Natalie into grungies which would be rejected from the Goodwill trash pile, but he looked at her as if she were a goddess from heaven.

He cried, "Natalie!" and he jumped up and down a few times, too. Then he raised his arms over his head, looked up at the ceiling and declaimed in Irish, with a very broad accent, "There *is* a God and the Saints are smilin' at me now!"

He dropped his arms, looked sternly at Natalie and me and said, "Nat, you never told me you had a younger sister." He glared at her a bit.

Natalie said, "Silly, she's my mom!"

I knew my jaw dropped and I looked over at Don. "Where did you *get* this guy?"

Don put on his innocent act, "Oh, just picked him up in front of Home Depot — you know, where the day laborers hang out."

Bob said, with a totally fake, nasal Spanish accent, "Si, Senior..."

We laughed — and I'd say if there had been any ice at all, it sure was broken now.

Bob and Natalie were just standing there grinning at each other so hard their faces must have hurt. Don finally got himself together long enough to make introductions, "Ana, this is the Brain Trust Bob Reynolds Natalie has been telling us about *every* evening and *every* morning for the past week. Bob, this is my wife, Ana Matthews, and she's Natalie's mother, not her younger sister, and I'm Natalie's step-father — hmm, on the other hand, since you mention it, she does look as if she could be Natalie's sister..."

I looked daggers at Don, "And his blarney is rubbing off on you now; I thought all the Irish came from my family. And I think I know exactly who set this all up — you and Rose Baer."

Bob told me, "Well, in Mr. Mathews defense, ma'am, Mrs. Baer did drop me a note to go see him. I had no idea he was related to two stunningly gorgeous young ladies."

Don just looked around blandly, "I know NOTH-THINK, NOTH-THINK."

Bob

Lord. God. In. Heaven. Now that was a wonderful surprise. Maybe Mrs. Baer and Mr. Matthews had a conspiracy of some sort going, but I was all for it. Spend time with Natalie outside of school? Yes! Go for it!

Well, I'd better start earning my wages. "Okay then. I, for one, could spend all night leering at these two fine bits of stuff, but it doesn't get paint on the walls."

I looked over Natalie's and Mrs. Matthews' clothes. "Good. Long sleeves, long pants. The bandanas are good — old ones have a lot more personality, and they've been washed so often they're soft enough to tie easier and they cover better. Good choice.

"Now, I've been in the construction and renovation game for as long as I remember. We've got lots of women in the business. Women's bones and muscles usually aren't built heavy enough to do well in the heavy-labor side, but in the less physically-strenuous side they do just fine.

"We've got a lot of ladies on our painting crews, and they do great at it. It *is* physical work but well within the general female physical makeup. Actually, they're often better at it than the men — they tend to have a better aesthetic sense and they produce beautiful work.

"I don't know if Mr. Matthews told you..."

Mr. Matthews broke in, "Bob, here at home, I'm Don. This is..." He looked over at his wife questioningly, and she nodded. "Ana. And I'm sure this other lady here is *not* Miss Shanahan."

I got his point. "Thank you, Don, I appreciate it. But anyway, if Don hasn't told you, if the client has a willing family, I usually apprentice them in things like painting. I teach them the ropes, get them started, and usually they can take it from there."

"It may take longer to get totally done, but it's less expensive and very often is much more satisfying to have done it themselves. So, is an apprentice deal the way you'd like to go?" They agreed it sounded great.

"Now, painting has its hazards, especially to the ladies. The dust from sanding, the patching compound and the paint all tend to get spread over one's body. That's why your bandanas, long sleeves and long pants are good; we might even put some masking tape around your wrists and ankles for a better seal."

"Since all this dust and stuff settles, it gets on the face and hands. If you're not careful, your faces and hands could end up like mine." I screwed up my face, pulled my hands into claws and gave out a tragic moan, which got a good laugh.

"So, not to be too personal..." I walked over to Natalie and ran the back of my hand over the side of her face (she leaned into it, which got my heart going faster). "You ladies should get some of your inexpensive body

lotion or something and just slather it all over your faces and some on your hands. Don't try to rub it in too much. That way, the dust and paint will just settle on top and not get to the skin. Then when you're done for the day, some plain soap and water takes everything off with no problems. Okay? So, you two, scoot and get lotioned up." I shoed them out of the room.

I turned to Don and asked him, "You and Mrs. Baer did set me up, didn't you?"

He looked at me seriously. "Yes, we did," he said. "Ana's been under some tremendous pressures lately, and while Natalie and I have done our best, she's still a long way from what she was before. Rose says we can trust you completely, and I believe it from what I've seen tonight.

"She suggested if we could get you together with Ana, you could find a way to get her cheered up, and help us get back together as a family much faster. Of course, we also saw it as a way to get you and Natalie together outside of school without violating the 'no-dating' policy, too."

I looked back at him and told him, "Ya know, you're like my father in many ways. The older I get, the smarter he seems to get. You're pretty clever yourself, for an 'old guy'".

He got the joke. I suggested, "Why don't we chat about this maybe tomorrow or Monday sometime so we can all get in on this conspiracy to

get your wife back and your daughter happy. I can only see the situation getting better, with everyone winning and no one losing.”

Don

Yes, he was right. Anything we could come up with would help. I was sure, with an outsider’s view and his interest in Natalie, we could find a way it all could work. I agreed we should meet again in private, and pull Natalie and Rose in on it, too.

Well, the ladies came back all lotion-faced, shiny and laughing. Bob inspected them, made appreciative noises and dressed us all out with latex gloves, dust masks and safety goggles.

He taught us how to spackle, patch, sand, tape and all those other little things prep-work needs.

Even with all the work, we had lots of fun. Ana and I noticed Bob and Natalie doing what we’d done when we were first dating — the touchy-feely game. They’d “accidentally” back into each other, wiggle their butts together a little bit then ease away. The light touch on the shoulder to “steady” themselves. Yeh, Ana and I had played that game, too. They giggled, laughed and had a great time. We felt the waves of happiness coming off them.

Bob was always enthusiastic about everything. If he’d just patched something, he might do a little Irish jig in front of it, “to get the air

circulating around and help it dry faster.” He moved around like a big cat; every motion was smooth and looked as if nothing could stop it.

I saw Ana watching them too and could tell she was smiling. When she looked over at me, I wiggled my eyebrows at her. She giggled herself and wiggled her boobs at me. Well, if the youngsters could play, so could we.

So we did our own touch-feely game. Maybe we were a little more overt about it than Bob and Natalie, but no one seemed to mind. God, it felt so good to do it again.

After the prep work was done, Bob called a halt and we straightened things up and got the dining room ready for painting the next day.

We looked pretty funny when we took off our dust masks, goggles and gloves. Just as Bob had said, the dust had settled all over us, and we had inverse raccoon-eyes from the goggles and clown-mouths from the masks.

Bob went off home, we sent Natalie off to her room to get cleaned up, do her homework and all that, and Ana and I got cleaned up ourselves.

We took our first shower together in over six months. Nothing really sexual, but being close to each other and helping wash the naughty bits was fun.

We got into bed and Ana snuggled up to me. She murmured, "Don, that was tiring and fun, and I forgot to be afraid for the whole evening. Let's make things get better and better from now on."

I stroked her back and kissed her. "We'll do just that," I promised as we drifted off to sleep.

Sherry

(Friday 9/16)

At Friday lunch, George, Bob and I were in the cafeteria while Natalie had ducked into the bathroom. Bob was telling George and me about the job he'd worked last night, "One of the new teachers, Don Matthews, needed a room painted. He said he had a wife and daughter who were willing to learn, so I offered the usual 'apprentice' routine."

I noticed Natalie had come up behind him, and I subtly motioned to her to stay where she was.

Bob told us, "Turned out I couldn't really tell which was the wife and which was the daughter. They're both drop-dead gorgeous and sexy as hell. Good thing I was wearing my large boiler suit — I was so 'up' all night Mr. Matthews would have kicked me out on my ass if he'd noticed."

I noticed Natalie getting pinker and pinker. Was she getting jealous or something?

Bob went on, "The daughter's *really* something. Smart as a whip, great sense of humor, big blue eyes I could fall into forever, the cutest freckles... and Irish! I've *gotta* find a way to *tutor* her..."

Natalie let out a strangled gasp and smacked Bob with her shoulder. "You wanker!" she spit out.

Bob turned to her and acted surprised. "Oh, Natalie! I didn't see you! Sit down. What's up?"

"Tutor me, my ass!" she said indignantly.

"Natalie, was it *you* last night? Oh, my God, I apologize. I was so horny I didn't even recognize you. Of course, I'll tutor your ass and anything else I can."

"In your dreams, buster!"

"Yep, I dream every night."

"I'll make them nightmares if you're not careful."

"That would be a terrible thing to be saddled with." He grinned.

I had to break in, "Well if you two are so hot for each other, why don't you do something about it?"

They both sobered up right away. Bob looked at Natalie and nodded for her to speak.

“My family’s got a major situation we’re trying to handle,” she told us, “and until it’s over, I’m basically grounded — no dates, no extra-curricular stuff, nothing.”

Bob broke in, “It has nothing to do with anything Natalie’s done.”

“Right,” Natalie continued. “But in the meantime, Bob and I are stuck with the situation. We’re trying to work out something with Dad — actually my step-father, it’s why our last names are different — but until then...” She shrugged and frowned.

George and I both offered, “How can we help?”

Bob said, “Don’t know right now. We’ve got to do some strategy planning, but I’ve got an idea it will involve you two somehow. I got a note earlier to see Mrs. Baer sixth period today.”

Natalie said, “I did, too. Probably Dad will be there.”

∅∅

Chapter 3

Don

(Friday 9/16)

We got together in Rose's office during sixth period. Rose asked Bob, "How do you think last night went with Mrs. Matthews?"

With a straight face, Bob said, "Well, I was my normal quiet and shy self..."

Rose laughed. "Yeh, right. The only day you've been shy was the day before you were born!"

We laughed. Bob said, "Actually, I think it went well. I only molested Natalie a little bit, so they didn't get too mad at me."

Natalie promptly smacked him on the shoulder. "Better watch it, buddy! Don was in the Shore Patrol in the Navy, so he knows how to handle rowdy sailors."

I smirked, "Yeh. The usual way is to let them get on with it! Anyway, Ana volunteered to me last night she had a lot of fun, forgot to be afraid the entire evening and really wanted to make things get better. I haven't explained to Bob what happened to her, and I don't think Natalie really knows the whole story either."

Bob said, "Hmm..." We looked at him. "Between what Natalie and Don have told me, it appears Ana is the issue here. Now, I haven't pried too much. It seems it's Ana's story to tell, not theirs — and I can't find fault with that. However, I did notice Ana was getting around fine, so I assume this isn't a chronic physical trauma or issue, right?" he asked.

The rest of us shook our heads no. "Okay then. It's probably emotional. I picked up a lot of fear and despair from her at times last night — which eased off a lot when Don, here, got closer to her. Natalie said there was an 'external influence' to the family, so am I correct in thinking her issues really have little or nothing to do with either of you two?" He waved at Natalie and me.

I told him, "Nothing at all."

He asked, "Natalie said it was one of the reasons your family came to California, so whatever happened wasn't here?"

We told him, "Yes. Where we lived before."

"Does she work? Has she gotten out of the house much?"

I told him, "She used to work at a hospital. Since this happened, she's not worked at all and only goes out when she's with me."

He asked me, "How does she think of herself?"

I told them, "She's mentioned several times she feels like an object, a piece of nothing, a non-person."

"Okay. Has she had any counseling?"

"Quite a bit at the beginning. She still keeps in touch every couple weeks. The thing is, she seems to have reached a plateau. Not getting worse but not getting better either."

Rose said, "Well, I've been a student Counselor here for years and have handled some things similar but never so, let us say, to as great a scale as this. Bob, from things you've told me and from what several other students have told me, you actually have much more hands-on experience than I do. What would you recommend?"

"Putting me right on the spot, eh? Well, let me think a bit." His eyes got a long-distance stare for a minute.

"Okay, here's what we know are minus points. Ana's had an emotional trauma not involving her family. She no longer works outside the house. She doesn't go out at all except with someone she trusts totally, like Don. She feels herself to be an object, a nothing. She's probably in pretty much constant fear. She's afraid or terrified of people, not the

environment as such. The situation's not deteriorating, but it isn't getting better. Right so far?"

We agreed. "Now for the plus points. It happened some time ago, at least months, I presume. Since then she's had a major change in environment — coming to California — some education — all good counseling does that — and some direct counseling. She has a family which loves her and wants to help, and she wants to help herself — you just don't know how.

"In somewhat similar situations I've been 'involved' in, here's what I've recommended and what has worked: First, start getting her in frequent contact with people who treat her special, who can constantly push her up and let her know *they* think she's special and worthwhile.

"Next, or in addition to, get her around people who are happy, who aren't afraid of life. As teachers, you've already seen the people kids hang out with help determine what they become. Kids and adults who are around criminals, druggies and such tend to become criminals and druggies.

"On the other hand, being around happy, social, goal-oriented people helps *them* become that way themselves. We need to show her not all people seek to injure her, and there are people worth knowing and being with.

"That's pretty much the general plan. Now, as to specifics, Don here doesn't seem to object to Natalie and me being together outside of school..."

I told them, "Not at all. In fact, I approve — it's mainly Ana's fear spilling over onto her. Natalie's been tremendously supportive, but from what I've seen and from what she's told me, she's hurting herself from it. Anything which helps Ana and helps Natalie would tend to get my approval."

Natalie and Bob looked at each other and smiled widely. Bob continued, "Well, with that ulterior motive in mind, here's what I recommend. We've got the dining room to finish painting tonight. I'll continue to treat Ana as I did before — as a *person* and push her up even more.

"Next, I want to get George and Sherry involved. Natalie's been hanging out with us since the beginning of school, and I trust them completely. The four of us have several classes in common, so let's get a study group together at the Matthews' house. We've tried a study group before, and it's worked out really well except meeting at any of our houses just hasn't worked out for long — It's been too noisy, too many kids, not enough room, whatever.

"Don, your house would be perfect for us. You'll have a newly-renovated dining room we can all praise Ana for and no other distracting influences. It would help us out, and George and Sherry are experts at handling people, pushing them up and making them feel really proud of themselves."

Rose broke in, "I'll vouch for that. I've seen them in action. If someone wants to change for the better and it seems Ana does, these guys can do it."

"Thanks, Mrs. Baer," Bob responded. "They've proven themselves many times. I'll clear it with George and Sherry. I'll tell them to treat Ana 'special,' and they'll know what and how to do it — they don't need to know any more."

"Don, I'll let you know later today if they agree. If they do, over the weekend or maybe at the beginning of next week, why don't you ask Ana if Natalie and I can study together at your house and why your house. I don't think I'll have been so offensive to her that she wouldn't agree. Of course, you'd be there while I'm there, so she'll have that trust factor working for her."

I agreed, "It's a good plan."

"Then, after a couple times, we could add Sherry then a few times afterwards, George. Make sense?"

I exclaimed, "Totally."

"Great. Now, we also need to get her out of the house more. She's probably got too much time just to think and dwell on whatever happened. We need to get her into action, get her to experience more of life. Get her over to visit her parents. I'll tell my folks Natalie's my new

girlfriend — actually she's the only girlfriend I've ever had — and I'll get my mother to invite your family over to our place for a 'getting-to-know-the-parents' event."

Rose said, "And Bob's parents are really good people, too."

Bob smiled. "Well, I think so, too. We'll get Ana to meet more and more good people. For example, my folks have a Halloween party every year for family and the construction crews as well as for Thanksgiving. If we can get Ana to those, she'll really meet some outstanding people.

"I want her to get so she can live, so she can attack life and be in control of it, not be the effect of it as she appears to be now. Any other ideas?"

Rose raised her hand. "Got my vote!" she stated.

Natalie raised her hand, "Mine, too."

I said, "I agree also. We have formed the conspiracy!"

Ana
(Friday 9/16)

I was really looking forward to having Bob back to finish the dining room; I didn't think of him as a "male." He was lots of fun, and it doesn't hurt an old lady's morale any to have such an Irish stud flirt with her, either, especially since we know it's just a game. Natalie was really happy for him to be there last night, too.

We got back into our grubbies after dinner and were ready when Bob came over around six. He got us all in the dining room and we started.

“You guys did *great* last night,” he said. “The prep work is almost always the hardest, dirtiest and takes the longest, but you all did very well. Ana, a couple of your patches are just perfect; I can’t see any hills or valleys in them — hills and valleys are for women’s bodies, not walls — they’ll paint over just right.” Jaysus, bring on the blarney again!

“I see the ladies have their face armor on. That’s good. Don and I, being macho men, can’t be bothered with stuff like that, right?” he grinned.

Don, of course, flexed his arms and said, “Ugh. Me macho man.”

Bob told us, “We’ll be using rollers to do the open areas of the wall, but first we’ll ‘cut in’ the corners, the ceiling and around the window and door frames. Ana, since you’re used to the high altitudes of beauty, how about you take one ladder and start around the ceilings and the tops of the corners. Don can help steady the ladder or anything else he can lay his hands on. Natalie and I will work on the trim for the windows and doors. We shouldn’t need dust masks at all tonight, and we’ll use the goggles when we roll. Okay? Great. Let the painting party begin!”

He showed us how to open the paint, stir it up then pour out some into smaller paper buckets. He demonstrated how to dip the brush (“No need to shove it in all the way, just an inch or so at the end”) and how to make

the short strokes (Shit, Don does it to me that way sometimes, and it drives me wild.).

Seemed simple enough. Don and I grabbed a ladder and started on the walls up at the ceiling. Don “helped” me by grabbing my ass a few times to “steady” me while I was on the ladder. I dripped a little paint on him to let him know how much I appreciated it.

He even reached around and grabbed my boobs a few times as I was coming down from the ladder. “Wouldn’t want you to fall, now would we,” he leered at me. I got back at him by grabbing his crotch.

Bob and Natalie didn’t notice, or if they did, didn’t say anything. They were playing their own touchy games while they were getting the paint on the walls.

Bob told me a couple times I was doing it “reeeal good” and told Don to make sure I didn’t fall.

Don

Another fun night. Ana appeared to be happy to have Bob over again, and of course he laid the blarney on her right away. Ana and I got assigned to cut in the walls near the ceiling, so Ana would go up the ladder while I steadied it and held the paint can.

I managed to grab her ass a few times to help “steady” her — she didn’t seem to mind, except I got a few more drips on me than usual. I got my

hands on her tits a couple times too; she just leaned back against me, wiggled them a bit then twitched her butt out of the way and grabbed my crotch. We were facing away from Bob and Natalie — don't think they'd mind, but you've got to keep up appearances.

I heard Natalie laugh and say, "Oops." Bob growled at her. When Ana and I looked, Natalie had "accidentally" managed to swipe her paintbrush across one side of Bob's face. He said, "Watch it, Apprentice! The Sorcerer may have to chastise you severely!"

A few minutes later I heard her giggle again. Somehow, she'd managed to get the other side of his face, too. He mock-glared at her, ran a finger through the paint on his face and collected a big glob on the end. So fast I couldn't see it, he reached out and deposited it right on the end of her nose. She didn't even get a chance to blink.

"Don't make me get out my Rod of Chastisement, young lady," he growled.

"Oh, please do, please..." Natalie giggled at him. He just shook his head and backed out of range.

Bob

"A good time was had by all." I felt "cheerful" from Ana and she was doing a good job. I could see Don was taking liberties with her and she gave off a little flare of enjoyment every time.

Natalie managed to paint my face a couple times, so I gave her a clown nose. We played our Touch Games, too.

I saw an opening to get in another zinger while Ana was bending over getting some paint on her brush. "Don," I asked him, "How long have you been out of the Navy?"

"About 10 years. Why?"

I nodded towards Ana. "Well, I see you haven't forgotten how to 'grab-ass'."

Natalie

I heard Bob ask Don about the Navy and something about "grab-ass." They were looking at Mom while she was bending over — both her butt cheeks had big dusty handprints on them!

Don and Bob laughed, so of course, I had to join in. Mom stood up, turned around and said, "What!" She had handprints all over her boobs, too. "Don," I told him, "you've got to brush up on your anatomy. That doesn't look like grab ass to me!"

Mom looked down at her chest and actually blushed! She turned her head and glared at Don — "You!"

Don threw his hands in the air and tried to look innocent — yeh, sure. "It wasn't me!" he tried to assure her.

I heard Bob gasp loudly. “Ana,” he said, “I do so totally apologize!” He turned to me with a contrite look. “Natalie, I’m so sorry — I thought she was you!”

God, I felt my face burn — everyone was looking at me now. I knew he was joking since he’d been next to me all evening, but all I could do was stutter a bit — while I thought of Bob grabbing *my* boobs! My nipples tightened up hard enough to poke holes through our newly-patched wall.

“Bob, I think you need more practice in telling women apart...” Don commented then Mom chimed in with, “Yes, lots of practice on the *right* girl so you never get it wrong again.”

Don announced firmly, “Bob, I think Natalie needs to give *you* some severe chastisement.”

Mom contributed, “At the very least a good tongue-lashing.”

Bob dropped to his knees in front of me and cowered down. He kissed my shoes and whimpered, “Please, Mistress, chastise me — lash me with your tongue — please.”

Images and the feel of my tongue running over him — all over him — ran through my head. I know I had a full-body blush by now, even if no one could see it — and I felt my pussy drooling too.

Of course, Mom and Don just stood there laughing at me. There was no doubt they hadn’t caught the double meaning and my reaction.

Ana

God, they ganged up on me — Don's handprints all over my ass and boobs couldn't have been more incriminating. Then Bob turned all the attention onto Natalie. I could tell what she was thinking right away — she wanted his hands on her boobs. I didn't blame her in the least; when I was her age, I wanted hands on my tits, too.

Then he managed to turn our comments into another double meaning. Tongues... I looked over at Don, and he just raised an eyebrow and leered at me pleasantly. We remembered a few "tongue-lashings" we'd each gotten from each other. Christ, I was getting turned on! With all that stuff going on the last few months, Don and I hadn't done a thing — and now we were both remembering — and wanting.

Natalie was standing there blushing. I could see her look and knew she was really turned on, too. She tried to act all indignant and told Bob firmly, "Away, varlet! Remove your lowly hands from my person!"

She jerked one foot away hard enough she knocked over one of the unopened paint cans behind her — it clattered to the floor and rolled around.

It startled her; she turned around and jumped back. Conveniently, Bob stood up and caught her by the elbows. He called out, "Watch out! The Paint Monster's loose!"

Natalie

Paint Monster? Why not? With Bob holding me, I wasn't afraid — but I could act like it. "Ahh! Help! Save me! The Paint Monster will eat me!"

Bob whispered in my ear, "No it won't, that's *my* job." Oh, my gushing pussy.

Ana

The paint can hit the wall and rolled back towards them. Bob orated, "We can conquer the Paint Monster!" Don and I were both laughing hard.

Bob put his foot out and stopped the paint can. He told Natalie, "Put your foot on it!" She did and they both pushed it away. Bob announced proudly, "The Paint Monster has been de-FEETed." Ugh, rotten pun. My stomach was really starting to hurt from laughing.

Natalie laid her head back against Bob's shoulder and looked at him adoringly. She mocked up shaking and gushed, "Oh, my Hero! Thank you, thank you. I was so scared."

Bob held her closer with his hands on her elbows, laid his head on hers and rocked her back and forth gently. "'Sokay," he crooned. "It's gone away. It can't hurt you now. 'Sokay.'" He said it over several times.

Oh my God! My heart pounded, and I felt all the blood drain from my face. Don and I looked at each other, and he held his arms open. I ran to

his arms with my tears coming down. He held me close and helped me out of the room.

Bob

With Natalie backed up to me like she was, I got hard as a rock in an instant. While I rocked her back and forth, she pushed her butt into my hard-on so firmly I had to put a foot back to keep my balance. I felt our breathing speed up and I know both our heart rates must have doubled.

I think we could have stood there like that for a long time, but after a few moments, I eased her forward and let her go. She turned around and I saw the same longing in her eyes as I had in mine.

I told her sadly, "Too much for right now, I think."

She said quietly, "Yeh, I know. Later — but hopefully not too much later."

I'd felt a sudden change in emotion behind us while we were rocking. When I turned around, both Don and Ana were gone. I looked at Natalie with a question. She shrugged and said, bewildered, "I don't know."

I put the fingertips of my hand on her cheek and just held them there. I told her, "You're wonderful, Natalie," and let my admiration flow towards her.

She put her hand over mine for a moment and told me, "You're not too bad yourself, Bob." I felt her admiration towards me and it felt so perfect.

Finally we stepped back from each other. I told her, "We've still got plenty to do. How about you finish the window and door trim. I'll finish the cut-in around the ceiling then we can roll." We got to work.

We worked steadily away for another hour. I don't know what had happened with Ana and Don, but I hadn't picked up anything directed towards me or Natalie, so I let it go for now.

Natalie finished up her part just as I got done myself. I looked things over and told her, "You do good work, Nat. Lines are nice and straight, the spread is even and we're ready to rock and ROLL!" She looked pleased at the praise, but she had earned it.

I got out the rollers and coached her on what to do. We got our goggles and latex gloves on and rolled away. We'd gotten almost all the first coat finished when Don came back in, alone.

I looked at him and said, "Don, I apologize. I think we triggered something, but we definitely didn't mean to."

He looked back at us steadily. "I know that. It just so happened you got one of her major triggers exactly right — it's not your fault at all; you couldn't have known."

Don clapped his hands once, looked around and said, "Looks as if we're almost done here."

I agreed with him. "Yes, your lovely daughter is a most excellent apprentice. She did this while I just goofed around."

Natalie snickered and said, "Yeh, right."

I indicated the walls. "They actually look pretty crappy right now with the paint drying. Look at it again tomorrow or whenever and decide if it needs a second coat. If so, and Ana is feeling up to it, we can knock the whole thing out in an hour or so, even with the final cleanup.

"Now, I'm not going to say a thing to Ana about what happened — as far as we're concerned, it never happened. If we put any attention on it, the reaction will tend to stick, so we ignore it. In my experience, it's always worked out best that way. Agreed?"

Don

Ana was okay, really just a minor shock. She apologized to me, but I told her not to concern herself about it; tomorrow was another day.

The next day, I thought the walls did need a second coat. Bob was not at all surprised, he said it was usually how it happened. We got together Saturday afternoon and knocked out the second coat.

Bob and Natalie acted as if nothing unusual had happened. Ana gradually brightened up again and was laughing with the rest of us by the time we'd gotten the second coat on and everything cleaned up.

(Sunday 9/18)

Sunday, she and Natalie did girl stuff on the windows, re-hung the pictures and got me to muscle the dining table and chairs around for a couple hours. Move the table an inch at a time, wait for them to discuss it, move it again, wait again — well, what the hell, she was smiling.

Ana agreed to have Bob over for study. I thought she had a soft spot for him, especially since Natalie had been showing how much she liked him.

The studying went great. We agreed on a Monday, Wednesday and Thursday schedule with any other time needed.

Bob and Natalie would laugh and joke with Ana and me and in general, light the place up. They got a lot of studying done, too.

The second week, they brought Sherry into the group. She and Ana hit it off right away, especially when she found out Ana was an R.N. and had a Management degree.

“Hospital Administration! WOW! An Executive in our midst!”

The three kids looked at each other and said simultaneously, “Brain pick!”

They’d keep asking Ana’s opinion on things, and every time they’d subtly pump her up about how helpful she was and how valuable it was to spend time around her.

We slipped George into the group a couple times later. Between the four of them, they got a lot of work done, and Ana seemed quite happy to have them over.

George was a computer whiz — not that Bob wasn't, but George was a real guru.

He and Bob set up a wireless network in the house. George set up some small boxes, and Bob crawled around under the house and in the attic while Natalie and Sherry "supervised."

After all the hardware was in place, George sat down in front of Natalie's computer, pushed up his sleeves and announced, "Observe! My fingers never leave my hands!"

He typed away, clicked the mouse, consulted his notes and made screens pop up and down like they were Jacks in a Box. He did the same with my laptop then continued his incantations with Bob's and Sherry's laptops.

We ended up with an encrypted wireless network which was available anywhere in the house, including the dining room where they studied. They could research on the Internet through our DSL, work up papers then print them on Natalie's printer in her room.

Geeser, the Irish-named cat, had a great time with them. They liked him, so he'd sprawl out on the table and go to sleep, usually right on top the papers they needed most.

If they disturbed him, he'd grumble then get up for a moment and walk around on their computer keyboards. Lots of their documents got cat tracks in them.

Most of the time, he'd just sleep in the middle. The kids would pet him lightly while they read, and he'd lie there asleep and purr so loudly I think the table vibrated.

Of course, they gave Ana credit for his being so nice.



One evening while they were there, everything shook a little and the chandelier swayed. Earthquake!

We (Ana, Natalie and I) looked around nervously but the others... Bob just reached out, petted Geeser a little bit to calm him down and said, "Welcome to California! Probably a 3-pointer. We'll need to make a run around the house sometime to ensure things are tied down for the next one. They *do* get bigger."

Ana

Having the kids over for study was working out just great. They were all smart and happy, and we got along just fine. It was pretty obvious George and Sherry were a couple, and they treated Bob and Natalie as a couple too.

Don and I happened to be coming into the dining room when I heard Sherry ask Natalie, "How do you two *do* that? My folks can talk with each other without saying anything, but they've been married for 20 years now."

I motioned for Don to wait a moment; this was interesting. Bob said, "Well, you both know Natalie and I sorta fell into each other the first day we met — we hadn't the faintest idea what was going on but have since found out a few things.

"You know I've got a pretty reliable empathic sense of what other people are feeling, and I occasionally pick up some thoughts and images, too. Since that first day, we've avoided **falling** into each other again, somehow, since although it felt great, we didn't seem to have any control over it beyond an off or on.

"We've done a little research, and Nat and I have been practicing. We've come up with a method which seems to work. It may not be exactly what's happening, but it works and maybe we can teach you guys too. If we can, we can assume it's not just some wild talent Natalie and I have. You up to it?" He looked over at Don and me, too.

He coached us on how to "reach out and touch someone" like the old telephone-company ads but with attention and intention and how to send out spiritual admiration.

When Don did it to me, I exclaimed, "It was like he **kissed** me!"

“Yeh,” Bob and Natalie both laughed. “That’s a lot of what love is about, a lot of admiration — and that’s how Natalie and I get in a whole lot of smooching at school without the teachers worrying about the Public Displays of Affection,” Bob grinned and cocked an eyebrow at Natalie.

Natalie piped up, “And now since George and Sherry know how to do that, they’ll probably have some full-blown make-out sessions in school without getting busted.”

George and Sherry looked at each other and I saw George’s eyes go distant for a moment. Sherry gasped and said, “George!”

Bob and Natalie both laughed. Bob told George, “You need to keep your attention and intention pretty tightly focused. I know you think it smells, tastes and feels great, but if you don’t keep focused, anyone with any sensitivity will know what you’re thinking about. Both Natalie and I picked up what you were sending.”

They leered at Sherry who promptly smacked George a good one — and blushed again.

Bob said, “Now that was between two people who have a lot of liking for each other and who trust each other, so it was actually fairly easy. With practice, you can do the same with other people whom you don’t know so well — you can **look** and **listen** to them and actually pick up what they’re thinking about — sometimes it’s emotions, other times its actual thoughts or pictures.

“An interesting thing... it’s not so much as we’re learning to do it, it’s more like we’re *remembering* how. We seem to get quantum jumps in the abilities which seem so familiar they’re like, ‘Of course, how silly of me to forget.’ Looks like another subject for research and discussion.

“The distance between probably doesn’t matter. Natalie and I have practiced, and we can **touch** and **talk** with each other anywhere we are in school. In fact, we’ve done it a few times when each of us was home, and we’re several blocks apart. I don’t really see any reason why the distance can’t be in miles, hundreds, thousands or even millions of miles. The physical constraints don’t seem to be there.

“Nat and I seem to keep an ‘open line,’ like being on the telephone together. We might not say anything for a long time, but we know the other is there — and it’s extremely comforting.

“So it’s practice, drill, practice, boys and girls. It’s a whole new world for all of us. Now, we’ve got homework to finish up — and no cheating!”

Bob
(Saturday 10/1)

One Saturday morning, Don and I made a tour through the house and garage looking for potential earthquake issues. I spotted a few, mainly bookcases and stuff which could fall over, so I dug out my cordless drill and strapping and tagged them into the wall.

I noticed a full bookshelf over the head of their bed. I told them, "Unless you want to attempt to read them all at once in the middle of the night, I'd recommend you replace them with those stuffed animals over there. We spend about a third of our time in bed, so there's a 30% chance one will happen while you're there."

Ana immediately delegated Don and me to removing the books while she and Natalie spent the next twenty minutes getting the perfect arrangement of the various stuffed bears, monkeys, cats, chipmunks, you name it.

Being nosy, I looked everywhere; I even stuck my head up into the attic. I was especially interested in Natalie's room; I did a thorough inspection, but nothing unusual turned up — it smelled wonderful, just like she did.

I steered them to the Internet sites on earthquake preparedness and recommended they make up a couple earthquake kits — stuff like food, water, lighting, that sort of stuff.

In the garage, I saw three golf bags! "Don, from the looks of those, you all play, right?"

"Yep. We've all done it for years. Haven't been out at all since May, though."

“Aha! Withdrawal symptoms! *That’s* Ana’s problem! We need to get you guys out. There’s a decent driving range and course about five minutes from here, and you get a Burbank resident discount.”

Don immediately called an emergency family conference and they decided they’d go tomorrow.

“Do you play... golf?” Natalie grinned at me.

“I don’t know if you’d call it *play* yet. I started this summer, and I think I’ve learned you’re supposed to hold the straight end of the stick in your hands and hit the ball with the crooked end.”

Natalie got an evil look on her face. “You are coming with us tomorrow!”

“You just want to beat the pants off me, huh?”

She pinked up a little as she whispered, “I’d rather beat something else off.”

“So would I. Patience. Our time will come.”

Natalie (Sunday 10/2)

We went golfing early Sunday morning. Bob suggested we put the bags in the back of his truck so we wouldn’t have to pack them in our car trunk. Don liked the idea, since he was usually the one stuck with putting them in.

Bob picked up a bag in each hand and straight-armed them into the back of his truck without hesitation. Jaysus! Don's bag alone probably weighed fifty pounds!

Just when I was about to climb in the back seat of our car, Mom said, "Honey, why don't you ride with Bob." She nodded her head seriously, grinned and flicked her head towards Bob's truck.

Me turn that down? No way, Jose! I dashed for the truck, opened the passenger door and slid right up next to Bob. He looked at me with an eyebrow question.

"Hello, there," I said in my most sultry voice. "Mom 'suggested' it."

Big Bob-smile! "And when Mom 'suggests' something, it usually behooves the suggestee to comply with alacrity, right?"

"Right." I sighed contentedly and laid my head on his shoulder for a few seconds. He smelled good!

It was about a five-minute run into the hills up to DeBell golf course. Bob suggested we see if there happened to be a tee time available. We checked and there was! About an hour away.

Bob paid for us all. "We get a residential discount. The first time, it's my treat."

I'd go for it. I stored the information away for a later, very personal repayment with *lots* of interest.

At the driving range, Bob got us each a small bucket of balls, probably about 50 each, got in his stall and did his warm ups. I did mine, ensuring there was lots of bending and stretching.

I'd claimed two adjacent stalls for Bob and me. I took the right-hand one so my back was towards him when I was hitting. My evil plan began!

I had on my baggies but even with those, I noticed my ass got outlined when I bent over. For you non-golfers out there, when a golfer gets in position to do his shot, he sticks his butt out behind him — men and women.

Each golfer has his own pre-shot ritual, such as waving the club, shaking his shoulders, whatever he's developed to get in the mind-set to take the shot. Mine was about three seconds long and now I added an additional move just before I started the take-away (backswing).

I wiggled my ass side-to-side about three times then started my swing. My first stroke was pretty much where I wanted it — not bad for not having picked up a club in almost six months!

As I took my stance for my next stroke, I *felt* Bob's attention go exactly where I wanted it — on my ass! Then when I wiggled it, I heard him groan. Yes! I decided the last wiggle was exactly what I needed to add.

After ten or fifteen balls, I turned around and watched Bob. He had a good grip and stance as far as I could tell, was relaxed and had an excellent athletic swing (where the upper body "winds up" then the legs drive the club through the ball). No hooks (bad bend to the left) or slices (bad bend to the right), but I did notice one problem.

It's probably pretty hard for a guy to concentrate on the ball when he's got a raging hard-on; probably something to do with the blood supply being diverted from the brain. Too bad. I stared at his crotch while he made a couple swings.

When he glanced up at me, I was still staring. I leered and licked my lips. I *felt* a mental groan from him. He tried to concentrate but kept spraying the balls all over.

I remembered what George had done to Sherry when they were first learning to spirit-talk, so at the top of Bob's next backswing (when all the muscles are fully tightened up), I gave his dick a real light *squeeze*. I saw his pants flatten out, and he literally collapsed in a heap! YES!

He unwound his legs and arms, stood up and mock-glared at me. "You are so going to get it one of these days, Natalie!"

"Bob, day or night, I'm ready!"

"Groan." I *felt* him get even harder.

I turned around and continued hitting, making sure to keep in the last wiggle. In fact, I would occasionally wiggle my ass just as I took my stance, too.

Suddenly, as soon as I stuck my butt out, I felt a caress over both cheeks and must have jumped straight up at least a foot. Now it was *my* turn to glare! Bob was giving me his best innocent look while I scowled at him.

He blinked his eyes and said, "What?"

"You know what, buster."

He shrugged nonchalantly. "Turn-about is foreplay," he grinned.

Foreplay. Fuck the foreplay, I was ready right then! However, I didn't think the course manager would appreciate a couple of golfers screwing on the driving range grass, so I let it pass and went back to hitting balls.

I kept feeling his caress every couple strokes then *I* started to spray my shots. I guess my blood supply was being diverted from my brain into my nipples and pussy juice production. Every swing I made, my sports bra squeezed my boobs and nipples and shot a jolt of energy right down to my clit!

Finally I said, "Truce?"

"Okay. For a little while."

It took me the rest of the bucket to steady out again and let my headlights dim down.

Our tee time was up, so we went over to the clubhouse and claimed our carts. Mom “suggested” Bob and I ride together. Yes again!

Bob let me drive. I think it had something to do with the fact that I climbed in behind the wheel and gave him a look which dared him to say anything.

“I like having a chauffeur,” he grinned, so I drove the cart up the ten feet to the first tee.

Long hole, uphill. I managed to get a fairly decent drive off, up the left side. Bob put one right up the middle, about 175 yards. We applauded him, and he bowed grandly. We were off!

Ride and hit. Putt. Ride to the next tee. Fun! Mom and I were hitting from the front tees (women’s), Don was using the back tees and Bob used the middle ones.

At the third hole, while Mom and I were setting up our balls, I told her, “Mom, the guys are staring at our butts.”

She smiled gleefully. “I know. Male prerogative. However, we might as well make it interesting.”

We hitched up our pants snugly into our crotches, bent over with our feet apart and knees straight and our asses pointed straight back then planted our tees. Of course we had to ensure the ball was placed just right on top of them, which involved several good butt-wiggles.

When we stood up and turned around, Don was flat on his back playing dead. Bob was on his knees with his right hand over his heart and his left hand straight up, shaking like a leaf with his face contorted. He slowly fell forward on his face and lay still.

Mom and I high-fived! Got them!

We'd all made good drives, so we had about a minute's ride. Bob had miraculously recovered and was just lazing on the seat. He turned his head and stared at my boobs.

He **licked** my nipples with a hot, very wet phantom tongue! They popped straight up even with my sports bra trying to hold them down, and I ran the cart off the track!

After I got the cart back on the track, I asked, "So the truce is over then?"

"Well, I think we'd better keep the truce while we're in motion or you'll be a golf widow before we're even married."

Married! Jaysus, it sounded great.

I said, "Okay. Truce while anyone is in motion, getting ready or hitting."
"Truce."

At the eleventh hole, we took a pee call. Don and Mom took theirs first; us younger folk have better bladder control, I guess. I got in the stall, yanked everything down, sat and let it flow. After I patted dry, I had a nasty idea! We're not in motion!

I called him, "Bo-ob! Oh, Bo-ob?"

"Yes, my precious, angelic sweetheart?"

I told him, "Feel this!" I stroked my fingers from my pucker up to Miss Clitty and pushed the sensations at him.

"Holy shit!" I felt him grab Little Bob and start his own stroking.

Damn it was fun! He was **feeling** what I was feeling, and I **felt** him build up, too! Yes! In a couple of minutes, we shared a great mutual orgasm! I managed to keep it down to a loud moan, but my heels were really bouncing on the floor!

I had to mop up a lot — there was pussy juice dripping off my butt. I put a thick wad of TP in my panties, just in case; we still had eight holes to go!

When we came out, Bob grinned at me, gave a big fake sigh of relief and said, "Well, the tension is relieved for a little bit, at least."

“The day is still young, so be warned!” I laughed back at him.

We actually behaved ourselves the rest of the back nine. We shared lots of **kisses** and **hugs** but kept the rest off limits until we were done.

Understandably, I had a score of 110 — I usually hit in the low 90s. Bob was in last place with 120. Well, he’s a beginner, so it wasn’t really at all bad.

Bob told us all, “Since I’m the low man, I guess it means I spring for dinner, right?”

Mom grinned at him. “Since you offered...”

Bob

I took them over to Tony Roma’s for dinner. Relatively decent prices, decent food and good service from a foxy-looking young lady. Natalie gave me an elbow in the ribs every time I looked at her.

We had a very nice time. Ana was laughing, cracking jokes, putting out really bad (great!) puns and kept snuggling up to Don. Nat and I felt “happy! happy!” from her all the time.

I dropped their bags off about 7:00, **kissed** Natalie and went home. I got my shower, practiced my cards, generally goofed off, and got to bed around 10:00.

I reached out over the two blocks, gave Nat a nice kiss and asked her, “What cha doing, sweetheart?”

“Wondering whether or not I have enough energy left to play with myself.”

“Oh, my. Well, if my pretty lady needs some help...”

Sproing! I felt her nipples pop up and her pussy get slick. She gave me a, “Hmm...”

“Nat, before we start anything, let’s find out something. Was I too rough today? Did it hurt any time? I had no idea how much pressure to mock up, so I tried to be just over a tickle.”

“It was purrrrfect, Bob. Any lighter would have tickled and much harder might have hurt. Did I squeeze you okay?”

“Very okay.”

“Good.”

“Let’s try something. You’re in bed right now?”

She sent me a fake blush. “You peeked!”

“Not yet but if you insist...”

“In a little bit. What perversion did you want to try? Pant, pant!”

“Later. Let’s see how much pressure one of these touches we’re doing can do — on something which doesn’t hurt. How about you roll your sweet bootie off the bed.”

She rolled off the mattress and stood beside it. “Okay.”

“By the way, Nat, I love your nightie.”

“Oh, this old rag! I’ve had it since I was born — my birthday suit!”

“YES! The eye in the sky is going to watch you!”

“I don’t mind in the least. I hope I’m attractive to you without clothes.”

“Natalie, sweetheart, you’d be attractive to me if you were four feet tall, weighed 250 pounds and were flat-chested.”

“Purrr. Look away.”

I looked. She was totally beautiful *all* over with her alabaster skin and freckles — especially those two big freckles on her chest!

“Drool, pant, hubba hubba!”

“You men! Is that all you think of?”

“No. This one thinks of how wonderful is his lady, how sweet is her laughter, how her eyes light up when she sees him and how brilliant she is.”

“PRRRR! Now, we were going to try something on the mattress before we got perverted?”

“Yeh, I’m going to try a light pressure in the middle.”

We saw the cover flatten out a little bit.

“More pressure now.”

The mattress got a dent in it a foot across and a half-inch deep.

“I’d call it a ‘mild.’ Now more pressure.”

The dent was several inches deep.

“Nat, stand on it with one foot, and let’s see how deep it goes.”

She climbed on, bounced once or twice (her breasts vibrated beautifully!) and stood on one foot. The dent was about three inches deep.

“You’re about 130, right? That means my ‘mild’ was putting out around 150.”

“Ouch, it could hurt over a small area.”

“Okay, get off again and we’ll try something stronger.”

She got off and we practiced. A “mild” was probably 150 pounds, “medium” around 300 pounds, while a “strong” made the whole bed frame creak under a dent which pushed the mattress all the way down to the under springs. It didn’t matter which of us did it, the effect was still the same.

“Honey, I think we’ll need a lot of calibration work on this sort of thing. However, it could handle muggers in a hurry. I won’t even try to think how even a ‘mild’ would feel around my nuts.”

“I don’t have nuts and I still can feel the pain!”

“Okay. I’d still rather do this…” I gave her a kiss and a hug.

“Yeh, those are almost entirely ‘mental’ I would say, even though I felt a feather touch on my mouth and all over my body. Now, I’m getting back in bed, so hold off on the mattress experiments.”

“Yes, my love.”

“By the way, Bob, what perversion did you have in mind for tonight? I can think of a few other ways to abuse a mattress than what we were just doing.”

I ran a hot, wet phantom tongue up her slit.

“Woosh! That was good! Just what I’d like if you were here physically!”

“It was just over a ‘feather.’ However, there’s no feedback, so I don’t know how it tastes, feels or smells.”

“We’ll get there eventually, my love. In the meantime…”

Between her fingers and hands and my “phantoms,” we managed to drive her through three very nice (by her reckoning) orgasms. She learned how

to squeeze Little Bob and move it up and down... damned near better than I could do myself!

We shared a final, mutual climax which was intense enough she had to take a big mouthful of pillow to keep from screaming. Nice!

SS

Chapter 4

Natalie

(Monday 10/3 and later)

The next day was wonderful and miserable. Wonderful because we played the Touch Game but miserable because we couldn't do more. Our last-night's games seemed to make our physical restraint so much harder. We were aching with the desire to grab each other and hold each other close — and more.

We talked about it and decided doing it was really too much of a strain on us, especially if we were going to be together the next day. Even with our hormones running full flow, we decided to be "chaste" and maybe "give in to our base desires" only on a Friday or Saturday night — and not too frequently.

It worked out. We'd "get together" and play every other week or so — no particular schedule. It was both wonderful and frustrating.

During the weeknights, we might share sensations very lightly as we relieved our stresses but kept the sharing way down — and *no touching!* It didn't rule out the completely mental snogging (making out!), long fun talks and serious discussions while we drifted off to sleep.

Next year, Bob was going for an Associates Degree in Architecture at the Glendale or Pasadena Community college.

“Natalie, I'm not looking to have a job. That's J O B, Just Over Broke. You never make what you're worth, you're usually treated like a slave and as for advancement... we'll let's say most corporations lie a lot about your opportunities.

“There's really no such thing as a 'good job.' Most employment is 'at will', which means if they don't like the color of your hair, you're out. How many employees have an actual contract? Don, for example, can be out of work in a minute if the school district decides to close down or cut back Mickey C for whatever unfathomable reason they might have.

“Anyway, I'm going to specialize in renovation work for a while. I'm good at it, and I can control my income to a great degree. The more I work, the more income I make — and my time is my own to schedule. I can swim with the dolphins or get eaten by the sharks, but it's my decision. End of lecture.”

Over the next couple months, Bob coached me a lot in inspecting someone — looking at them to see how they were feeling emotionally,

whether they were Boy Scouts or slime, what areas they were touchy about and things like that. It got so automatic I'd thoroughly inspect everyone I met the first time then when we met the next time, scan them quickly again to see how they were doing.

I even matched up a few couples! I'd notice someone was lonely and looking, so I'd try to match up their personalities with someone else I knew. Fun!

I started talking and walking to our lockers with a Junior girl after our last class. Lucia and her sister, Bellana, a Freshman, had transferred in the same time I did, so I tried to get them introduced around as much as I could.

Lucia was really nice, but she had some real deep issues with men. She had stuff hidden real well but I could tell underneath she had some real self-esteem issues going on. It didn't make her less pleasant — besides, both she and her sister were pretty smart academically.

Bob had told me to keep an eye out for underclassmen we could bring into the Brain Trust; when we graduated, the Inner Circle was no longer there and we needed replacements. Lucia and Bellana looked pretty good and I had my eye on another Freshman girl — a golden-haired girl with a gorgeous smile and a really deep mind.

All of them had been helping other students with their work, even if it had been a few suggestions or to-the-point questions which got them back on track. Lookin' good!

Bob

I'd gotten Leone hooked up with Mark Healy. Apparently they hit it off fine because we saw them together quite a bit in school.

Leone would smile and wave at us; Mark would wink. Once Leone whispered to me, "You did good! He's a *great* tutor. Turns out I can barely beat him in golf, but we literally make beautiful music together. He plays piano really well and has this deep rich voice which makes me shiver every time I hear it."

"Yeh and I bet I know what happens when you shiver," I told her — and admired her perked-up nipples for a few seconds.

She laughed, grabbed Mark's arm and they walked away with her butt twitching. With her, I bet it's totally natural. I noticed Natalie's butt twitching a lot, too, whether she knows it or not.

Natalie

Don and I got Mom over to Nana and Seanathair's place several times. The second time, we brought Bob along and introduced him as "Natalie's friend from school."

They didn't hesitate a second but made him comfortable and welcome. It turned out his Father's company had done some work on their property and Bob had been on the crew!

They remembered him because he'd been so happy, had made them feel so good about themselves and their home — and had done an excellent job on a complex renovation.

We put on our Irish accents a little more, mixed in a bit more slang and had a great time. We discussed Black Irish and Red Irish.

Bob said, "There seems to be a lot of interpretations of what 'Black' Irish means. When my family talks about Black and Red, we're talking hair and eye color. Black has very dark to really-black hair with blue or gray eyes like Ana, Natalie and me, while Red has red hair with green eyes, like my parents and my older brother. Freckles or peaches and cream complexions have no bearing on it."

My grandparents were one of each and loved it. Bob told us, "My family is genetically pretty much all Irish. Culturally, we aren't hard-nosed Irish like the New York and Chicago families are, but we seem to keep the accent going.

"We observe the Irish holidays because it gives us an excuse to party, and that's about all the Irish culture besides the language and slang we have. Probably the New York and Chicago clans consider us all Plastic Paddies."

My grandparents loved him and insisted he come along on our twice-a-month visits. I doubt they were fooled for a second about his just being a “friend from school.” It didn’t hurt that Bob rattled away with them in Irish Gaelic, either.

I asked him about it later; I knew some Irish Gaelic by osmosis from them and Mom, but he seemed to speak it fluently. He grinned and told me, “I cheat. I just **link** with them a bit, pick out the words and grammar I need to get the concept across and let it roll. Same with Spanish. My accent’s probably atrocious, but no one seems to mind. When they talk, I listen both physically and mentally.

“You get the sound of the words, the concept, spelling (usually), grammar, the whole bit. Best way of learning a language I can think of. Then, when you speak yourself, you can **send** the concepts over to them at the same time, and they get the whole thing in their particular dialect.

“We might try it some time with a Filipino for Tagalog, a Mid-Easterner for Arabic, an Armenian in Glendale, that sort of thing. Anyway, you try it sometime.”

I did and found out I could even rattle quite a bit of Spanish with Sherry — she knew what was going on and helped me out. I was even able to match up a few Spanish couples, too!

Lucia and Bellana were part Italian; her family spoke Italian, Spanish (not Tex-Mex Mexican) and English pretty much all at once. I practiced with

her and found I could spit out a fair amount of Italian at a moment's notice. Then I had to learn all the hand and arm gestures to go with it!

Don, Mom, Bob and I went out at least once a month for a round of golf. Bob and I avoided teasing each other quite so much, and he finally broke 100 on a respectably-tough course! Yes!

Mom continued to "suggest" we ride together, so we actually got in some sanctioned snuggle-time.

Don (Friday 10/7)

Near the start of October, Bob's parents invited us all over for dinner since we were part of the study group and to meet Bob's girlfriend.

Both David and Elizabeth were Red Irish about 40 years old. Elizabeth has flaming-red hair, while David and Bill (Bob's older brother) have slightly darker hair. The entire room looked like there were fires moving around.

The Reynolds made us feel totally at home. Within a half hour, Ana was laughing and joking with them like they were family — and to a large extent, they were, since Bob was a de facto part of our family.

David was one of the solidest men I've ever seen. He was about 6' 1" and *big*. He wasn't sloppy but every inch of his body was solid muscle. His chest looked like a barrel, and his legs kept threatening to split his pants.

Elizabeth wasn't a little thing either, being about 5' 8" but was a nice slender lady. Looks like Bob was a mixture of the two but with the Black Irish look.

Elizabeth kept pushing Ana up all the time. She'd comment, "Natalie's such a lovely lady. She's got impeccable manners, is really smart and Bob likes her a lot. You did a fantastic job of raising her."

I know of no mother who isn't flattered by someone praising her children.

We got invited back "any time" with a firm invitation to their Halloween party the last Saturday of October.

Bob

We had a really good Halloween party. Costumes weren't pushed but gracefully permitted. Of course, any kids coming could wear whatever outlandish thing they could think of.

Natalie and I borrowed a couple of Don's sailor hats and found a pair of play handcuffs. I wore one of Don's Shore Patrol arm bands and carried his baton. Natalie was supposed to be my prisoner and kept making frequent, loud offers to "make it worth my while" if I let her go.

I noticed Father looking at us intensely a couple of times. I knew he was picking up what our relationship really was, not what we were playing it to be.

We'd invited all our crew foremen and their families, along with Ana's parents. When we counted heads, there were about 50 people in the dining room. It was designed to hold 75 in a pinch, so we weren't crowded.

We chatted quite a bit with Lucia and Bellana Sonora. Their father was a crew foreman and was really good people. He and I had worked together several times, and he was a rich, deep spirit underneath. Over the summer, I'd helped them fix up the house Father had found them so it was livable.

The Sonoras had some deep stuff going on — something which kept eating at them. Nothing illegal or anything, just something to do with the girls and men — like a really *bad* relationship.

Natalie and I simply avoided any issues which might remind them of it and kept pushing them up. It wasn't hard, really, they were all very bright.

Ana and Don looked as if they were having a great time. They apparently found the rest of the crowd to be very friendly and kept laughing, dancing and having fun.

Having Natalie handcuffed to me was fun. We were able to get in a good amount of snuggling and of course, some mental touches and kisses, silent snogging and making out. We avoided any physical touches; we knew where that led.

Since she was my prisoner, Natalie insisted she had to be escorted everywhere. She even tried to claim I had to take her into the bathroom — fat chance! I knew that trick: get the guard alone, bop him over the head and escape. Not me!

We laughed, played games and had a good old time. The crew guys insisted I dig out my cards and show them how they worked.

So I did some of my card tricks. I did several of the “find the lost card” ones and pulled them out of Natalie’s, Bellana’s and Lucia’s blouse collars. The only thing was, Natalie kept unbuttoning her buttons and pushing my hand down lower each time until it was open to her bra.

Then, she loudly accused me of improper guard conduct by trying to “take advantage” of her status and warned the other two girls about my “magic hands.” I don’t think anyone was fooled in the least — in fact, we got several pieces of advice on how I should take advantage of her, since I had handcuffs.

One of the foremen said, “Righteous Bob, you can actually get along with just two restraints. Put one on a wrist to the post and the other on the opposite ankle. That way they can’t roll over very easily.”

At every suggestion, Natalie would cock an eyebrow at me, leer a little and say loudly, “Write it down, Petty Officer Bob. We need to remember that one.”

The crew called me “Righteous Bob” and Father “Big Dave” all night long. Natalie kept on snuggling up to me. “After all, you have to keep close tabs on your prisoner, right?” and “accidentally” kept pushing or rubbing her breasts into my arm or back — all with the Miss Innocent look she’d been practicing so much, even if it felt like her nipples were made of steel.

By the time the evening was over and I could “release her into her parents’ custody” my balls were aching like I’d been kicked. I had to relieve the pressure three times before I could get to sleep. Natalie and I were *sharing* our sensations lightly while she was at her place doing the same thing. Now *that* is constructive feedback.

Bob
(Monday 11/21)

The Monday of Thanksgiving week, I felt we had made enough progress with Ana to give it a shot. At study group, I managed to get George and Sherry away long enough (“Go smooch in the kitchen for a little bit, please. Take your time.”) to make my sales presentation to Natalie.

As I’d done once before the first week of school, I put my hand over hers. “Natalie, if it were in any way possible, would you give me the great honor of accompanying me to the Christmas Dance?”

Her eyes got real blue-bright and I got a great Natalie smile. “I’d love to but...” then she shed a tear or two.

“Yes, I know the no-dating policy is still in effect. However, you and your folks are coming to our Thanksgiving dinner party this Thursday. Maybe we can stuff them so full of turkey they’ll be too sleepy to put up a fight if we ask. It’s worth a try.”

She gave me a smile, “If we don’t ask, it probably won’t happen.”



Mother and I started cooking on Tuesday night. We made pumpkin pies, pecan pies, mincemeat pies, key lime pies, everything we could prepare and knew would keep a couple days.

Bill, Father and I absconded with one of the pumpkin pies and covertly feasted in the back yard. We’d done it every year for the past fifteen years, so of course Mother knew exactly what had happened. She did her customary moaning about “losing” or “miscounting” her baking while grinning to herself.

We did more Wednesday evening. We prepped the turkeys, hams, chickens, roast beef and all the vegetables. We managed an early bedtime but got up at 3:00 to cook some more.

(Thursday 11/24)

Ana, Don and Natalie came over about 8:00 to help out. Between us, we managed to get all the meat in the ovens and started getting the cooked

vegetables ready. We guys put up the full dining room table and set up three additional tables in the back yard.

We'd invited literally everyone we knew. The Matthews and their grandparents of course but also all the construction crews and their families, the McCambridge teachers (the single ones especially were happy), George and Sherry with their families, Bill's current girlfriend and her family — dayum near all of Burbank.

As each one of the construction crew arrived, the entire family called me "Righteous Bob" and Father "Big Dave." I caught Natalie looking at me with a little smirk once and snapped at her.

She looked really shocked but with good reason. It was the first time either of us had shown the least signs of inappropriate emotion. I apologized almost immediately, but we'd had our "first fight."

By the time 2:00 came around we were ready. Natalie, Ana, Mother and I were the main servers and made trip after trip from the kitchen to the tables. Somehow, I got cozened into carrying all the heavy stuff, like a 25-pound turkey in each hand. The ladies had made some remarks like, "I'm so delicate," so of course I had to take pity on them.

Natalie

I wondered why they kept calling him "Righteous Bob." Once when a three-year-old girl called him that, I smirked at him — and he snapped at

me. Shit! It was just a little snap, but it was so sudden and had *never* happened before.

He apologized immediately, but I'd seen some deep emotion underneath it all — for dayum sure I never wanted to have him mad at me.

I'd tried to make-nice by rubbing my tits on his arm and back and grabbing his cute ass when he wasn't looking. He'd groan, roll his eyes and hide his crotch. He wasn't fooling me a bit; he was as turned on as I was.

We kept on the run for over an hour getting the initial food load out and the first refills available. Finally we were able to settle down ourselves and eat. Of course, since we'd done all the arrangements, we got to sit together.

I promptly slipped off my shoes and ran my foot up and down his calf. He glanced at me then pretended to glare and growl.

When I had my best manners in (you know, one hand on the lap), I kept grabbing his leg beside me. He'd jump each time and I felt him get aroused.

He finally growled, “Don't make me get out my Rod of Chastisement, little girl.”

I managed to look both innocent (I think) and (definitely) expectant at the same time. “Please...”

Mom and Don kept glancing at us. I know they felt what was going on, even if we'd kept it down pretty much. I also kept feeling Dave's eye on us, too.

But despite all that, I could see Mom and Don were both having a great time. Maybe there was hope yet.

Natalie

After Thanksgiving dinner, Mom and Dad were standing in the Reynolds' back yard admiring the mountains and enjoying the California weather. Bob told me, "Let's go talk with them." We walked over and asked them, "Can we talk a bit?" I led us over to a quiet area in the back with some chairs.

Bob grinned at them, "Let's talk about the weather. Did you get days like this where you came from?"

Mom and Dad glanced at each other. "In the summer, it was fine. We'd get spells of really good weather," Ana allowed.

Bob looked around at the sky and the mountains. "The air's clear, a few nice clouds to break things up. Nice temperature; the air fans your cheek like a silk scarf." He paused a moment. "The sun shines down. It purifies the air, makes the earth grow and lets us see as far as we can.

“My dad’s parents live in Ohio and I’ve visited several times. It gets pretty nice there, too, but days like this are pretty common in Southern California.” He looked at them a bit, not really expecting any answer.

My heart was going like a snare drum but I managed to keep my expression pleasantly interested and my mouth shut. Bob continued, “Natalie and I have been hanging together with my crew at school and studying together at your place for almost three months now,” he said, looking directly at Mom. She nodded and didn’t say anything, just waited.

“The second day of school, Natalie told me of your family’s policy on no dating or other activities, so we agreed to be just friends. With any other young lady, it would probably have worked out okay. With Natalie, however, it hasn’t worked out that way. My friends really like her, too and their approval means a lot to me.”

Mom and Dad looked at each other again and looked back at us. Bob turned and looked at me and spoke to us all, “You light up my life and make me happy just by being there. When you smile, I feel so much joy I could cry — and I have several times. You’re the California Sunshine in my life and make me want to be the best person I can be to be worthy of you.”

He looked at all of us, “Am I in love with her? We’re just coming up on 18, and I’ve never felt this way before about anyone. I’ve nothing to

compare it to, but it sure seems to be love as I know it." He nodded at me and gestured it was my turn.

I felt my tears running, "Bob, you make me feel all I've been through the last seventeen years was simply to get me up to the level to where I had a chance to understand what being with someone could really mean. Most of the time I've been with you, I've had to hold off falling into your heart and just grabbing you with *my* whole heart. During the little time we've been around each other, I've grown to feel we make each other whole, complete. I want to make you happy; not just physically but as the wonderful person you are."

Bob

I wasn't really surprised at what she'd said; I'd been picking it up from her for weeks now. That she did have the guts to tell me in front of her parents raised my appreciation of her to new levels.

I turned to Don and Ana and told them, "Since the second day, we have held to your policy; we haven't tried to get around it, find loopholes somehow, or ignore it. We haven't held hands, done any physical smooching or tried to find places to get off to just to be alone together. Yes, we've touched each other a lot as you've seen, Don. The most we've ever done physically you've seen, either at your place, here or on the golf course. Now, it *doesn't* mean we haven't done a lot this way." I pointed to my head.

“And we rarely do even that; it more takes us too far down that path and makes more pain for us. In my opinion, you can be extremely proud of your daughter for respecting your wishes and her agreement no matter what it has cost her so far.”

I saw Natalie smiling through her tears. Don and Anna weren't particularly dry-eyed, either. “What all this comes down to is that in view of what I, at least, would call our demonstrated reliability, is to ask you both this: What must happen and what must I do to get your permission to take Natalie to our Christmas Dance in December?”

I'd finally put The Question to them. The answer was in their hands now.

Don

I knew what I wanted but Ana was the key. All I could do is look at her and try to convey what I felt without putting the entire burden on her.

Ana looked down at her hands for a minute then wiped her eyes and looked at Natalie. “You make me so proud of you. You've not only kept your word, you did that and more without a word or look of complaint despite all the feelings you've been having.

“When we made this agreement, I never realized how much I would hurt you by letting my fears spill over onto you. During the times I've seen you and Bob studying and working together, I've seen both of you

behave with complete responsibility — except for the same lapses I'd done when I was your age."

She looked from one of them to the other. "On the other hand, I've also seen the way you look at each other when you think no one else is watching. I've seen both the longing and the pain, but so far I've done nothing to help end it. I've contributed to your pain by not doing anything about it. That's my responsibility.

"Thank you both for trusting us enough to tell us how much you mean to each other. I know few who would have the courage to do that."

She looked at Bob respectfully and said, "You did well in choosing your home ground to bring this up." Bob shrugged a little and raised his hands slightly in agreement.

She continued firmly, "However, this isn't easily resolved, even with what you've both so willingly told us, and I don't really feel it's appropriate to continue right now.

"What we've gone over so far could be shared publicly with your family, Bob, but I don't think this is the time, place or the audience to continue. Can you come over to our house tomorrow afternoon? I need to discuss this a little with Don, but I think we can give you an answer then. I do know we must all make some major decisions and soon, before we cause more pain than already has occurred."

Bob asked, "One o'clock will be all right then?"

I said it would be fine. Then I looked at the ladies and said, "We should pay our compliments to our host and hostess then be off. I have a feeling tomorrow will be a busy day."

I helped Ana up from her chair. She took my arm, and we went looking for the Reynolds', leaving Bob and Natalie to say their goodbyes however they wished.

Natalie

I felt like laughing and crying at the same time, so all I could do was stand there looking at Bob, wanting so much to feel his arms around me and to have him comfort me.

Bob told me sadly. "I want so much to hold you and tell you how much I care for you, but I don't dare. I don't think I could let you go. Tomorrow, we'll probably be making decisions which could affect us for the rest of our lives, so we'll have to wait until then. But, no matter what happens, I want you to know now I'll always love you, Sunshine." With a **kiss**.

I could only shake the tears off my face and tell him, "And I'll always love you, Bob. Whether or not we can work us out, you'll always be the standard my man will have to meet."

He gestured towards the house, and we walked out of the yard to meet up with Mom and Dad.